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DUNGEON

ISSUE 131 · FEBRUARY 2006

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AGE OF WORMS ADVENTURE PATH

48 THE PRINCE OF REDHAND
Richard Pett
Prince Zeech, the ruler of the town of Alhaster and lord of the domain of Redhand, is throwing a party. Bandits, slavers, pirates, and worse have been invited, along with a mysterious woman who holds the key to the coming apocalypse. An Age of Worms Adventure Path scenario for 15th-level characters.

ADVENTURES

16 THE BEASTS OF AULBESMIL
Skip Williams
The sleepy forest town of Aulbesmil has seen better days. Orcs and monsters lurk in the woods now, but the real menace hides in the town itself. A D&D adventure for 3rd-level characters.

30 THE HATEFUL LEGACY
Greg A. Vaughan
At the end of the Hateful Wars, Lord Sandor led his army into the Barrier Peaks in pursuit of a host of goblins and orcs. He and his army vanished, and now a group of adventurers follows his footsteps to discover what doom fell upon him and his men. A Greyhawk adventure for 12th-level characters.

80 BACKDROP: ALHASTER
Richard Pett
Tour the dark streets of the only port in the Bandit Kingdoms—the troubled town of Alhaster. As the Age of Worms nears its epic conclusion, this city will become an important part of the unfolding events.

ON THE COVER

James Ryman paints a stunning portrait of our favorite cleric of Wee Jas, the model for Managing Editor James Jacobs's Age of Worms character, Tyralandi Scrimm.

CARTOONS

45 The Portent
79 Mt. Zogon
104 Downer

COLUMNS

8 Editorial
10 Prison Mail
97 Gamer Guide
94 Dungeoncraft
106 Map of Mystery

CAMPAIGN WORKBOOK

98 The Cast
100 The Dungeon
102 The Journey

"There were much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams."

Edgar Allan Poe
"The Masque of the Red Death"

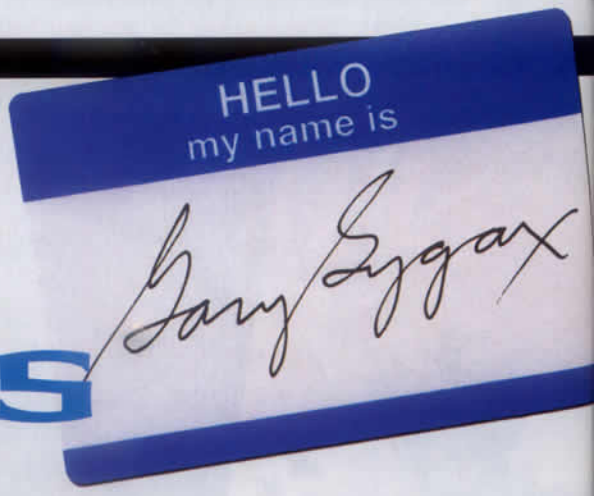
DUNGEON ADVENTURE PLAYER REWARDS!

Take advantage of the RPGA'S Player Rewards program by scoring points with the adventures from this issue of DUNGEON! Each adventure is worth 2 D&D Player Rewards points, and remains active until 3/31/06.

RPGA NETWORK

Drop by www.rpga.com for more details, and use the following adventure codes:

Beasts of Aulbesmil (131BA1DN)
The Hateful Legacy (131HL1DN)
Prince of Redhand (131PR1DN)



TRUE NAMES

Several years ago, when third edition D&D was just a rumor and I was a newly minted *Polyhedron* editor working in a tiny cube at Wizards of the Coast, I dropped by an online forum dedicated to discussion of Dungeons & Dragons and asked what I thought was a simple question. "When you're considering whether or not to buy a gaming book or magazine," I asked, "does the name of the author play into your decision?" I recall being quite surprised by the response, since a large majority of posters suggested that the author of a gaming book or adventure played a very small role. Factors like campaign setting, environment, or "coolness" trumped the author's name in almost all cases, which left me perplexed since it was so different from my experience.

Growing up with the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons game, I quickly learned to consider the source when deciding whether or not to buy a given gaming book. As first edition marched forward and the game became a cultural phenomenon, D&D's publisher, TSR, started to release what seemed like any adventure that arrived in their offices, including a large number that might best be described as "stinkers."

It didn't take long to realize that certain authors reliably provided the best gaming material, so I began to look for and buy adventures by those authors who had done well by my campaigns in the past. Tracy Hickman, who would go on to co-create the Dragonlance campaign, was one of my early favorites thanks to classic adventures like *Ravenloft* and the *Desert of Desolation* series, both of which cracked the top 10 in our "30 Greatest Adventures of All Time" feature back in *Dungeon* #116. But my favorite adventures came from the grand architect of AD&D, Gary Gygax himself. When Gygax's name appeared on the cover of an adventure module, you could be sure it would include fantastic locales, deadly traps, and plenty of opportunities for exciting D&D action. His name on a book made it a must-buy for me (and apparently for a lot of other people, since TSR eventually started putting his name on books largely written by other people, presumably to raise sales).

After Gygax left TSR, company policy eventually dictated that the brands were what sold RPG products, and author names soon found themselves exiled to the back cover and eventually to a tiny entry in the book's credits page. An entire generation of gamers came to D&D at a time when you really had to hunt to see who wrote a given product, and I suspect this policy is largely responsible for the response I got to my original Internet thread.

A lot has happened since then. The creation of the d20 and Open Game Licenses flooded the market with hundreds and hundreds of D&D-compatible adventures and accessories of extremely varied quality. Wizards of the Coast alumni like Chris Pramas (Green Ronin Publishing) and Monte Cook (Malhavoc Press) set up their own companies and have consistently delivered a high-quality product that has gained the attention of gamers who didn't used to care about who wrote their RPGs. And Wizards of the Coast has included author names on the cover of just about every D&D book they've published to date.

When I came on board at *Dungeon* a little over two years ago, I started putting the names of our authors on the cover of the magazine because I believe an author's name is a great way to predict whether or not you'll enjoy a given adventure. To use an example from this issue, if you liked Greg A. Vaughan's "Istivin: City of Shadows" campaign arc (*Dungeon* #117–119) or "Tammeraut's Fate" (*Dungeon* #106), chances are strong you'll also enjoy "The Hateful Legacy," on page 30. Skip Williams, who served as "the Sage" for *Dragon's* rules advice column for more than a decade, hardly needs an introduction to fans of the game. Richard Pett, author of "The Prince of Redhand" and the associated backdrop in this issue, is perhaps best known as the author of "The Styes" (*Dungeon* #121), one of the most popular scenarios we've printed in years.

Here at *Dungeon*, we make a big deal about our authors because we want to help you know what to expect when deciding to buy an issue or subscribe, and we pick the authors we do because we want you to expect the best D&D you can get for your dollar. That's a commitment I'm happy to put my own name behind.

Erik Mona
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Tell us what you think of this issue.

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Check out the *Dungeon* messageboards at paizo.com/dungeon

DUNGEON #128

"Joey, do you like movies about gladiators?" The *Dungeon* staff does, which might explain "The Champion's Belt," the fifth installment of the Age of Worms Adventure Path and the cover feature for November's issue. The eponymous belt first appeared around the waist of Auric, the fighter star (with his companions Khellek and Tirra) of a series of old D&D ads that appeared on the back covers of comic books in the mid-1980s. The trio shows up again in the Age of Worms as a band of rival adventurers led by Auric, who we recently learned was a gladiator from the Free City.

The issue also featured a Backdrop on the Free City for use with the Age of Worms campaign as well as "The Fireplace Level," the final installment of Eric L. Boyd's Vampires of Waterdeep Campaign Arc. *Dragon*'s Assistant Editor Wesley Schneider and our very own Editorial Intern James Sutter teamed up to provide "Shut-In," a creepy roleplaying-heavy adventure that rounded out the issue. Back issues of *Dungeon* #128 and dozens of other great issues are available at paizo.com.

Prison Mail

Good for Ages and Ages

I just thought I'd drop you a line to let you know that I think you guys have really nailed it with the Age of Worms Adventure Path so far. I'm now eagerly anticipating getting *Dungeon* in the mail every month as opposed to only mildly anticipating it (or worse, dreading it). In fact, I haven't played a consistent D&D game in nearly 3 years (but could never bring myself to cancel my subscription) and I'm considering piecing a group together to run these adventures. I had been considering letting my subscription expire until I really started reading the Age of Worms adventures. In fact, my continued interest in D&D might rest entirely upon your shoulders there at Paizo. (NO PRESSURE!)

Second thing, since I'm writing anyway, is that I am very impressed with the new layout. Yeah, yeah... it's old news by now. But during my recent moving process I was forced to go back and dig through my archived *Dungeon* and *Dragon* magazines and I realized that your layout has not just changed, it's dramatically improved. All around the magazines are just higher quality. So thank you for watching out for my hard-earned cash, keep up the good work and I'm very glad that I made the decision to renew my subscriptions now.

Phil Creswell
Madison, WI

We're glad you decided to stick around too, Phil! Putting together the Age of Worms has been a real career highlight for everyone who works on the magazine. As usual, the key is planning ahead and knowing what you want editorially and artistically from the beginning. Working from a solid outline allowed us to get the authors and artists we wanted from the very start, and it's extremely exciting to see how those folks turn our basic outline into compelling adventures packed with their own creative flourishes. The final few installments are making their way into our offices now, and I think just about everyone (except perhaps some unlucky players) will be very pleased by what's in store.

As for layout, nearly all of the credit goes to our intrepid Senior Art Director, Sean Glenn, who was also responsible for the interior page design, font choices, and template designs for the original third edition D&D core rulebooks. He also designed the first third edition character record sheets, the Shackled City Adventure Path *book, the* d20 Star Wars RPG, *the* Star Wars Trading Card Game, *and tons of other beautiful RPG products from Wizards of the Coast, Paizo, and Green Ronin's* Mutants & Masterminds *roleplaying game line (but who's counting?). [Don't forget about my breathtaking work on* Dragonmech *from Goodman Games and of course, Todd Lockwood's art book* Transitions. *– Sean]*

I Say!

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the three adventures in the Vampires of Waterdeep Campaign Arc, and plan to employ them

in my FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign as soon as I can work them in. However, I notice that several of the NPCs speak "Tethyrian," a language to which I can find no reference in any third edition FORGOTTEN REALMS book. I assume that these entries should be "Chondathan," the default mother tongue of characters of Tethyrian heritage. While this is not a major problem for most FR DMs, I'm sure, I find it difficult to consider Mr. Boyd an authoritative source of "Realmslore" (as his bio indicates) when such a glaring error is included in his work. My home-brew FR campaign focuses a little more heavily on language barriers than most probably do, so I apologize if this seems trivial.

David Howarth
Magnolia, DE

If a FORGOTTEN REALMS fan doesn't care about trivia, is he still a fan of the FORGOTTEN REALMS? It's a philosophical problem that has puzzled us for generations, and it also makes a nice meditation koan. In any event, I passed along your concern to Eric L. Boyd, and here's his unedited response:

Eric's Response

I'm glad David enjoyed the Vampires of Waterdeep Campaign Arc. I enjoyed writing it.

As a designer, my three major "blind spots" in Realmslore include:

a) My own writing. (I tend to forget when I've played with an obscure fact before.)
b) Realmslore that changed between the turnover and the final product.
c) Realmslore that I wish was otherwise.

In the case of languages, I would have much preferred that Tethyrians had their own tongue, derived from an amalgamation of Alzhedo, Chondathan, Illuskan, and local tribal tongues. They don't in official Realmslore, but obviously I forgot when writing this campaign arc, for which I apologize.

I would point out that Tethyrians do have their own dialect of Common, called Calant, which may have contributed to my faulty recollection. (See FRCS, page 85.) Another contributing factor to my faulty recollection might have been Tom Costa's excellent second edition article in the 1999 *DRAGON Annual*, page 28. The third edition *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting* went with a slimmed-down version of Tom's article, which included two appropriate Tethyrian languages (Thorass and Thorasta).

A simple fix, albeit one with campaign implications, is to assume that Calant diverges enough from Common to require a separate language slot. (The rules are unclear on this point, as far as I know. I'm not aware if the Sage has addressed this issue yet.) In my campaign, we house rule that a dialect requires half the normal skill points to learn if you already know the base language.

Alternatively, replace Tethyrian for each NPC. I would suggest the following replacements:

Blood of Malar: None needed.
Dungeon of the Crypt: Fhang (Chondathan), Galguth Shund (Draconic), grisgol (Chondathan).
The Fireplace Level: Medechai (Chondathan).

Regarding the grisgol, one tiny bit of Realmslore that didn't make the editorial cut in "Dungeon of the Crypt" was the identity of the lich from which the grisgol was made, which I'll try to sneak past the editor again.

Riqysar Hazamir al Aktorral, the Caleph of Calimshan (104–107 DR) and Reqent Qysar of the Shoon Imperium (107–123 DR), faked his own death and embraced lichdom after relinquishing the qysar's throne to the young Qysar Shoon III in the Year of the Icy Axe (123 DR). Over two centuries later, in the Year of the Fearless King (361 DR), Shoon VII hunted down the fallen riqysar in the depths of Calimport and transformed him into a grisgol, built from broken and worn-out magic items and animated by the phylactery of the lich. The grisgol vanished from one of Shoon VII's lairs after its creator descended into demilichdom and was trapped in the *Tome of the Unicorn*. Artor Morlin captured the grisgol on the Fields of the Dead in the Year of the Seven Kings Horde (1131 DR), while battling an undead horde that threatened to engulf Baldur's Gate, and had it entombed herein.

See *Empires of the Shining Sea*, pages 25, 27–8, and *Lands of Intrigue: Erlkazar & Folk of Intrigue*, pages 8–12 for more details.

Again, my apologies for the linguistic oversight.

Eric L. Boyd
Via Email

If that last paragraph isn't enough to restore your faith in Eric L. Boyd as an "authoritative source of Realmslore," then I'm afraid there's nothing more I can do to help.

Bring on the Imp, Wimp

I recently convinced my players to start a new murder investigation campaign. I was satisfied to find a few such oriented adventures in recent issues of *DUNGEON*, starting with "Shut-in," followed by "Murder in Oakbridge" [#129], and since my campaign is set in the FORGOTTEN REALMS (more precisely in the city of Thentia), I plan to include a geared-up version the *Sons of Gruumsh* softcover adventure set in the neighboring city of Melvaunt.

In this type of campaign, where any NPC encountered may be the "killer," I decided to have a picture for possible suspects so the PCs can put a face on every one of them. Furthermore, to better blur the killer's trail, I even decided to have a picture for each major and minor NPC in town (the list is up to 35 NPCs with pictures as of now). I plan to do the same thing with Melvaunt.

In order to do this, I cannibalized many NPC pictures from the Age of Worms adventures and from other adventures found in *DUNGEON* as well. I want to insist that it is a *very good thing* for *DUNGEON* to have the good habit to include a picture for each NPC. Keep it up!

On the other hand, speaking of "Shut-in," I must complain about that little greenish thing you obviously thought was sufficient to be called the Dromdal Manor map. Well, I am sorry but it sucked big time. What happened? Did your talented cartographers go on strike? You know, we are used to getting very nice maps in *DUNGEON*.

NEXT MONTH IN DUNGEON

DUNGEON #132

WING-CLIPPER'S REVENGE

BY CHRISTOPHER WISSEL

Danger lurks in the woodland surrounding the village of Turvin. Strange lights and sounds emerge from deep in the forest, and now villagers have started to disappear. Some evil force is turning nature against mankind, and it's up to the PCs to put a stop to it. A D&D adventure for 4th-level PCs.

CAVERNS OF THE OOZE LORD

BY CAMPBELL PENTNEY

Something's not right with the hamlet of Verdinica. The locals are quiet and withdrawn, and seem strangely nervous about answering questions to outsiders. Why do they wear such thick clothing, even though the summer is so hot and muggy? And what sort of "prisoner" could make the strange, sloshing noises that are heard some nights coming from the gaol? A D&D adventure for 8th-level characters.

THE LIBRARY OF LAST RESORT

BY NICOLAS LOGUE

Tilagos Island does not appear on most maps of the Nyr Dyv, yet the storm-shrouded island hides the greatest repository of knowledge of an ancient cabal of druids who defeated Kyuss 1,500 years ago. The PCs must brave the mysterious island and locate this repository, itself a last resort against the Wormgod's Return. An Age of Worms Adventure Path scenario for 16th-level characters.

Don't ever let this happen again Erik or else I'll send my imp familiar after you!

Nevertheless, I'm hooked on the magazine.

Denis Barrette
St-Eustache, Québec
Canada

Using the art we publish in DUNGEON for NPCs of your own design is just one of many ways to get value out of the magazine without using the material exactly as presented. Our free online supplements include very handy versions of these illustrations that you can print out and use for your own nefarious designs. Drop by paizo.com/dungeon to start your supplement collection and beef up your library of NPC images.

The maps for "Shut-in" didn't really work as well as we had hoped, in part because the final print version ended up a lot darker than we had anticipated. It happens sometimes, unfortunately. We're definitely committed to publishing the best cartography in the industry, which means we'll sometimes push things a little too far. Sorry it didn't work out for you in this case.

Oh, and I can assure you that we'll eventually print another map you don't like, so I hope that imp of yours is a scrapper.

::Erik Takes an In-Character Action::

Firstly, I would like to say I am very, very pleased with the new format of DUNGEON. I have been receiving my subscription here in the Netherlands for almost a year, and am about to make my second yearly subscription payment. The content is great, and being a DM myself I have found the Age of Worms Adventure Path to be excellent.

I think it would be a great addition to the magazine to add D&D session scripts to it, in its original form so as to produce a type of ongoing story from which we DMs can take some ideas. For instance, I myself am currently playing an online game via a chat room, based in the FORGOTTEN REALMS, and I think that providing the main chat session logs so that they can go into the magazine would be a great addition. I for one would love to read chat sessions based on the adventures you have placed in the magazine. I think this would really improve the magazine.

Keith Appleby
Via Email

I'm not sure I agree with you, Keith. Having played in a few chat-based games myself, I find most of the chat transcripts to be pretty boring and more than a little nonlinear. The mind reels at how we might lay out such a log, and I'm not at all sure that the benefit to readers would offset the pages of adventure text we'd have to kill to make room for it.

On the other hand, the message boards at paizo.com include tons of battle reports from the Shackled City, Age of Worms, Maure Castle, and other DUNGEON-based campaigns, and each of those threads offer a wealth of advice and fun war stories from the adventures that will definitely help you improve your own play experience. The Age of Worms discussion folder alone is one of the most helpful game resources I've ever seen, and has been a huge boon for my own gaming. Visit us online and you'll soon see what I'm talking about.

Virtual Requests

First of all, I absolutely love DUNGEON magazine! I've been reading it since around issue number #32—whenever the heck that was!

Anyway, I have two requests:

1) Would you *please* bring back your online index? That used to be so helpful for us DMs. I was able to sort the index by Levels, Author, and Setting, and this made referencing the voluminous quantity of adventures easy. Please consider adding this feature once again.

2) Any chance that DUNGEON will be available online soon? As much as I adore the hard copy, my life is becoming more and more virtual. I'm sure I'm not alone in this) and the prospect of having everything I need contained on my laptop is truly exciting. Perhaps consider this in the near future.

Again, thank you sooooo much for your fantastic magazine. I hope it's still going 50 years from now!

I hope I am too!

Peter Kaplan
Via Email

We absolutely need to put together some kind of index soon, so consider it "on the agenda." As for a truly virtual DUNGEON, let's just say that it's something we're exploring. Right now we can sell electronic versions of issues that have sold out in hard copy form only (like #112's "Maure Castle" spectacular), but most of the recent issues have a long way to go before they reach that status. I wouldn't be surprised to see online versions of the magazine on sale shortly after the "real" versions hit the newsstand eventually, but I don't think we're quite there yet. Definitely by 50 years from now.—Erik Mona

THE BEASTS OF AULBESMIL

BY SKIP WILLIAMS
BY UDON STUDIOS WITH CHRIS STEVENS & PIERRE THERIAULT
BY ROBERT LAZZARETTI
ANY SETTING | LOW LEVEL (1ST–5TH) | RURAL AND FOREST

The forest town of Aulbesmil seems like just another sleepy town that has seen better days. Silver mines in the neighboring mountains played out years ago, bringing on economic collapse. The inhabitants now live by logging, farming, trapping, and prospecting where they can. All the while blissfully unaware of the orcs and monsters lurking in the nearby woods, and the real menace that hides behind twitching whiskers in the town itself. Unaware, that is, until now.

"The Beasts of Aulbesmil" is a D&D adventure for four 3rd-level characters. It is set in the rural village of Alubesmil, which can be easily dropped into a sparsely populated forest region in any campaign world. The adventure is open ended—while there are several situations in the town and its environs for the PCs to deal with, there is no specific order in which they must be resolved.

Adventure Background

Baron Aulbes founded Aulbesmil to reap the benefits of a nearby silver mine. When the mine ran dry, the baron's plans collapsed, but the town survives and still provides him with a trickle of tax money. The baron has honored his commitment to the townsfolk and maintains a local militia with a captain who also serves as the town constable. The only other baronial officer in town is the miller, who operates the baron's gristmill.

About six months ago, a wererat bit and infected Cloten the miller. Cloten has since joined a network of spies, fences, thieves, smugglers, and brigands that keeps a shrewd eye on the goods passing through the town. When a particularly choice cargo heads his way, Cloten does his best to steal it. He prefers subtle theft to violent attacks, and usually manages to snatch the goods so quietly that his victims aren't immediately aware they've been robbed. When there's nothing to smuggle or steal, Cloten preys on the local woodcutters and prospectors.

So far, Cloten has managed to conceal his condition and the murders he has committed because the townsfolk suspect that wild creatures or marauding humanoids are the true culprits. He

came closest to discovery on the night of the first full moon after he became infected. When he left the mill in a blood frenzy that night, he killed a pair of woodcutters. The next dawn, he returned to the site of the attack and disposed of the bodies by dumping them into the river that flows through Aulbesmil. Since then, Cloten has been careful to hide in the woods when the moon is full. More recently, Cloten has taken to depositing his victim's bodies near an owlbear's lair, hoping that the owlbear is blamed for the killings. One of Cloten's latest victims was Cyrus Fletcher, the captain of the militia. A new captain, Ghini Eagleye, has replaced Cyrus. In the meantime, Lysander Aulbes, the baron's nephew and heir, has gone to Aulbesmil to look after his uncle's interests and investigate the killings. Cloten, however, was forewarned about Lysander's errand and his henchmen have managed to kidnap the young man.

Adventure Synopsis

The PCs arrive in town to investigate a mysterious tragedy that has befallen the townsfolk. As they explore the town, they learn of other strange happenings and must assemble the puzzle to figure out who is responsible for the thefts and disappearances. Eventually, they track down the baron's culprit and bring him to justice, as well as liberate the captive nephew of the Baron.

Adventure Hooks

While it's possible for traveling PCs to stumble across this adventure by accident (they may hear of the recent slaying while staying at the Sylvan Glade Inn, for example), it is easier to keep things moving if you give the PCs a specific goal at the beginning of the adventure. Some possible adventure hooks are:

- One or more PCs has a relationship with one of the victims. Cyrus, the recently slain militia captain, is a good choice. A PC might have served with him in a military unit, or perhaps the slain captain was a friend of the PC's family.
- A PC with connections to the church of Pelor is dispatched to Aulbesmil in response to a request for aid from Kieron, Aulbesmil's priest.
- The Brass Wheel merchant company has had several valuable loads of cargo disappear from caravans traveling through the region recently. The characters are hired by the merchant company to investigate these disappearances by retracing the caravan's route and speaking to Durmain, one of the caravan's guards who now works at the Sylvan Glade Inn.
- Baron Aulbes recently received a ransom demand that claims his nephew is being held prisoner. The baron cannot send any of his regular guards to investigate, as he fears they'll be recognized, so he asks the PCs to go in their stead. He plans on stalling the kidnappers as best he can while the PCs look for Lysander, but even so they have only a few days to rescue him before the baron must turn over the ransom. He tells the PCs to investigate the hunting lodge where Lysander was staying near the rural village of Aulbesmil. He offers a 500 gp reward for his nephew's safe return, and doubles it if the PCs can also bring the kidnappers to justice.

AULBESMIL

The town of Aulbesmil lies in a forest clearing a few miles across. Fields of grain and groves of fruit trees dot the countryside. A river makes a broad loop that surrounds the settlement on three sides, while a millrace that runs straight as an arrow cuts across the western edge of the town, transforming it into an island. Two low stone bridges span the river just east of the millrace on the north and south sides of the town.

Within the town, all seems neat and tidy, if worn. Most of the buildings are stone, with fine glass windows. The paint on the doors, window frames, and shutters has faded, although none of it is actually peeling. The stone walls and pavements seem to have more than their share of cracks, but there are no weeds. The buildings have slate roofs, bleached to pale gray by long exposure to the sun. Here and there, the slates have been replaced by wooden shingles.

The most impressive structures in town are the mill and a modest inn, both two stories tall. A spire over what appears to be a temple rises at least twice as tall as the inn.

The recent spate of killings in the woods around the town has put the townspeople on edge. Still, they welcome any visitors with money to spend.

Aulbesmil (small town): Conventional; AL NG; 1,000 gp limit; Assets 47,800 gp; Population 956 adults; Mixed (human 79%, halfling 9%, elf 5%, gnome 3%, dwarf 2%, half-elf 1%, half-orc 1%

Authority Figures: **Linnus Wholcotte**, mayor (NG male human aristocrat 4); **Ghini Eagleye**, captain of the militia (NG female human, ranger 4).

Important Characters: **Kieron**, town priest (NG male human, cleric 2 [Pelor]); **Cloten**, mill operator (CE male human wererat aristocrat 1/rogue 2).

Town Militia (15): N human expert 1/warrior 2.

1. The Sylvan Glade Inn

Stately oak trees surround this two-story stone structure and its outbuildings, which include a stable and a small shed. The inn's double doors open to reveal a dimly lit common room with a well-worn but equally well-polished hardwood bar to the left and a triple row of round tables extending straight ahead. Embers glow in a fireplace at the back. A door behind the bar seems to provide the only exit, though there are windows in all the walls.

During the day a man named **Durmain** (LN male human expert 1/warrior 2) works behind the bar. Until recently, he served as a caravan guard. Durmain, like his employer, is a member of the town militia. At night, Luis Brawir, the inn's owner, tends the bar himself until the slow period begins around 11 PM. After that, another employee remains on duty here in the common room. The night shift isn't popular, and a different employee works each night.

For most of the afternoon, two to eight townsfolk relax here, enjoying a meal or a quiet drink. In the evening,

two to six farmers and trappers from the surrounding area join them.

Development: Any major disturbance in the common room draws the attention a patrol of five members of the town militia in 1d6 minutes. The captain of the militia, Ghini Eagleye, accompanies the patrol (see area 2).

The locals are glad to speak about their town and their current difficulties. The PCs can learn the following information by making a Gather Information check at the listed DC. A successful check for a given DC allows the PCs to aquire all the information given at the lower DCs as well.

DC 5: Something lurks in the woods beyond the town. It's best to be indoors after dark. People who live in the country usually stay with friends or relatives if they're in town after sundown, since so far the town itself has not been attacked.

DC 10: Our last militia captain went looking for monsters in the woods, and apparently he found one because it killed him. His body was brought back a few days later, ripped to shreds and partially eaten. (The locals' information is accurate as far as it goes. Cloten attacked and killed the captain, then dumped the body near the owlbear's lair. The owlbear didn't know or care who Cloten was, but it ate part of the corpse anyway.)

DC 15: The trouble started about six months ago. Local trappers and woodcutters started to disappear, usually one or two each month. More recently, a merchant caravan lost a guard who seems to have just walked off in the middle of the night. Durmain, who works here now, was a guard on that caravan. The missing guard was a friend of his.

DC 20: If this night killer has any connection with the town, the miller Cloten probably has something to do with it. That man is pure evil. (Cloten is in fact the source of the killings. He began attacking people in the woods near town after becoming a lycanthrope. After his first kill, Cloten realized what he had done and was smart enough to return to the scene of the attack and dump the body in the river before anyone realized there had been a killing. The locals have no compelling reason to suspect Cloten except that the miller is unpopular in the town. The locals dislike his glib manner and they suspect that he steals some of the grain he grinds into flour. See area 4 for details.)

If the PCs question Durmain he is initially cautious. He has already been blamed for the theft once, and is suspicious of strangers asking questions. If the PCs can improve his initial attitude of indifferent to friendly, he will tell the PCs the following story:

I was one of three guards for a merchant named Erthorn carrying two wagonloads of goods through the town here. He's a rich one, that Erthorn. Was a rich one. In addition to a wagonload of expensive silks and linens that I knew about, there was fat purse filled with coin he never mentioned.

When the wagons reached Aulbesmil, Erthorn decided he'd rather sleep in the fields than under this fine roof. Cheap fool. To this day I don't know what he was thinking. We'd heard about the "disappearances" around town of course, but he thought he knew better than everyone else.

That night it started to rain something fierce. The other two guards and I took turns watching for trouble all night, for all the good it did. Between the wet, the dark, and the falling rain, it was hard to see more than about thirty feet. I had the last watch that night, and when Ruburn, the other guard, woke me up looking like a drowned rat, I wanted to kill that stupid fat merchant. Still, it wasn't all bad, he brought me some drink to warm me up while I watched. I asked him what it was, but he just shrugged and curled up to sleep. It tasted good. I sat down and tried to keep an eye on the camp as best I could.

I'm not sure exactly what happened then, but somehow, I fell asleep, and didn't wake up 'till dawn. By then, I was soaking wet and covered with mud, and poor Ruburn was nowhere to be seen. But even worse than that, the whole wagonload of cloth was gone. Just gone. And there was no way we were tracking anything through that rain.

As soon as I woke up Erthorn, he started shouting about his missing purse. The fool. He started yelling at me, demanding to know what I had done with the money and the goods. I protested, of course, not that it did much good. To make a long story short, he left town along with the other guard, and they haven't been back since. And if I never see him again, it'll be too soon.

Durmain and his former companions were Cloten's victims. Cloten learned about the cloth shipment and the cache of treasure through his contacts and arranged to rob the merchant. When the group decided to camp outside town they played right into Cloten's hands. Cloten laid one guard low with a sneak attack, then quickly disguised himself as the defeated guard. He awakened Durmain and passed him a drink spiked with oil of taggit. Cloten brought he drink, still hot, from the mill. With two guards effectively eliminated, Cloten looted the wagons and withdrew, leaving Durmain to take the blame for the loss. The stormy night conveniently obliterated any signs that Cloten has ever been at the camp. Durmain still has no idea that he was dealing with an impostor, or that he was drugged. He thinks he simply got drunk and fell asleep. There was no fire at the camp that night where anyone could have prepared a hot drink, but Durmain doesn't realize that the lack of such a fire is significant (it suggests that someone in the town planned and executed the attack).

2. Town Hall

This sprawling single-story building has plain stone walls and a slate roof. The windows are surprisingly plentiful for a building of this size.

This stone building has space for the mayor's office, public meeting rooms, a jail, an armory, and office space for the captain of the militia.

Creatures: Ghini Eagleye, captain of the town militia, can be found here most mornings. During the day, she's out making her rounds. Her patrol route covers the entire town and a different quadrant of the surrounding fields each day. Four militia members are always on hand here to watch over the jail and assist Ghini.

GHINI EAGLEYE **CR 4**

Female human ranger 4
NG Medium humanoid
Init +2; **Senses** Spot +10, Listen +3
Languages Common

AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 17; Dodge
hp 25 (4 HD)
Fort +5 **Ref** +6 **Will** +2

Spd 30 ft.
Melee mwk longsword +7 (1d8+2/19–20)
Ranged mwk composite longbow +8 (1d8+2/x3) or
mwk composite longbow +6/+6 (1d8+2/x3)
Base Atk +4; **Grp** +6
Atk Option favored enemy +2 (magical beasts)
Combat Gear *potion of cure light wounds* (2), *potion of mage armor*, vial of *silversheen*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10
SQ wild empathy +4
Feats Alertness, Dodge, Endurance, Rapid Shot, Track, Weapon Focus (longbow)
Skills Climb +8, Heal +8, Hide +9, Knowledge (nature) +9, Listen +3, Move Silently +9, Spot +10, Survival +10
Possessions combat gear, *+1 chain shirt*, *+1 buckler*, masterwork longsword, masterwork composite longbow (+2 Strength) with 10 *+1 arrows* and 20 arrows, antitoxin, gold rings (20 gp), gold armband (25 gp), 5 gp

Dawnwind (wolf animal companion): hp 13; *Monster Manual* 283.

Tactics: Ghini and the militia are charged with the town's safety, and they take the job seriously. They don't tolerate threats or attacks from non-residents. If attacked, they fight to the death and if sufficiently annoyed they may try to jail the PCs.

Development: If the PCs are arrested, they are brought here to spend the night manacled to a wall. After the PCs have a chance to cool down, Ghini releases them if they promise to behave and they pay for any damage they've caused (plus 10% extra) as a fine. If the PCs were

foolish enough to kill someone, Ghini holds them for trial in the local baronial court, which could take up to a month to arrange.

If the PCs can improve her initial attitude of indifferent to friendly, Ghini can provide the following information:

- Everybody in town hates the miller. Baron Aulbes owns the mill and the local farmers go there to have their grain processed into flour. Most of the farmers suspect the miller of cheating. While an unscrupulous miller keeping back flour is hardly uncommon, there may be more to it in this case. Ghini herself is none too fond of the miller. He's the only person of any wealth and status in the town whom she distrusts.
- The previous militia captain was killed while investigating the disappearances in the area. He was alone in the forest at night and encountered a man-eating beast lurking in the wild. What he was doing alone out there is anybody's guess.
- Young Lysander, (Baron Aulbes's nephew) slipped into town quietly to look into the killings. He's staying at his uncle's hunting lodge southwest of town. If the PCs want to do Ghini a favor, they should visit the lodge with the captain's compliments and find out if there's any message Lysander would like to send back to town.
- Ghini has located the lair of the monster that ate the militia captain. Ghini hasn't yet dealt with the owlbear and happily gives the party the job of hunting it down. She offers the party 500 gp to kill the monster and bring back proof of its death. Ghini suspects the truth, that the owlbear only ate the corpse and did not kill it, but she doesn't share that with the PCs yet.

Ghini knows more about the situation in Aulbesmil than she lets on. She has no intention of joining her predecessor in the afterlife anytime soon and she doesn't think confiding in strangers is a good way to survive. She has been investigating the attacks and she's noticed that no attack has occurred more than a half-day's march from town. Ghini has also questioned a few local druids and other sylvan folk and knows that several bodies have been dumped in the river. She's had a chance to examine a body recently found in the river. Ghini's no expert on cadavers, but she knows bite wounds when she sees them.

Ghini has concluded that the attacker must be based in Aulbesmil and must command (or be) a monster with a bite attack. Ghini has not shared her suspicions with anyone. She doesn't want to start a panic or trigger any vigilante action. Ghini suspects that Cloten is behind the attacks, but has no proof. She is reluctant to search the mill because she fears she'll find nothing, but will alert the miller to her suspicions. Ghini would rather watch the miller from a distance and see if he makes a mistake that incriminates him.

If the PCs manage to impress Ghini, she tells them what she has discovered. The captain isn't easy to impress, but if the PCs successfully deal with the owlbear, or come to her with news of the baron's nephew or with a lead on the disappearances, she tells them every-

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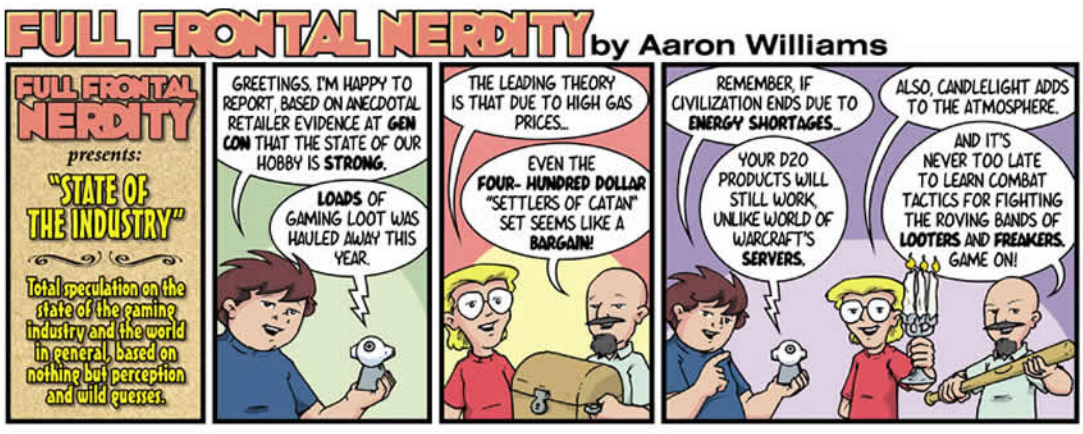
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GREETINGS. I'M HAPPY TO REPORT, BASED ON ANECDOTAL RETAILER EVIDENCE AT GEN CON THAT THE STATE OF OUR HOBBY IS STRONG.
LOADS OF GAMING LOOT WAS HAULED AWAY THIS YEAR.
THE LEADING THEORY IS THAT DUE TO HIGH GAS PRICES...
EVEN THE FOUR- HUNDRED DOLLAR "SETTLERS OF CATAN" SET SEEMS LIKE A BARGAIN!
REMEMBER, IF CIVILIZATION ENDS DUE TO ENERGY SHORTAGES...
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ALSO, CANDLELIGHT ADDS TO THE ATMOSPHERE.
AND IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN COMBAT TACTICS FOR FIGHTING THE ROVING BANDS OF LOOTERS AND FREAKERS. GAME ON!

thing she knows, and recruits them to help her arrest Cloten.

If the PCs have attacked any townsfolk (except Cloten) Ghini is hostile toward the PCs.

3. Temple

This stone, fairly small building possesses a tall spire topped with the radiant sun of Pelor.

Most of the temple's interior is given over to a single worship chamber containing a central altar ringed with benches. Locals use this chamber as an informal meeting place when services aren't being held.

The temple is open round the clock. A single militia member keeps watch here at all times. During daylight hours, there are usually about seven townsfolk in here as well.

The town priest, Kieron, holds dawn services here every morning, with shorter services at noon and sunset. As many as 15 townsfolk attend each service. Otherwise, Kieron divides his time equally between the temple and his residence nearby.

Kieron has much the same knowledge about the situation in Aulbesmil as the rest of the townsfolk at the Sylvan Glade Inn (see area 1). If the PCs change his attitude of indifferent to friendly he will happily share it with them. He urges the PCs to speak with Captain Ghini if they show any interest at all in serving the town or investigating the killings.

4. The Mill

This stone building is built in three levels over an artificial channel that carries river water from upstream under the mill's waterwheel, and back to the river downstream on the other side of town.

The mill's waterwheel isn't very powerful, but it's capable of grinding all the grain Aulbesmil can produce in a season.

4A. Entrance Hall (EL 4)

This chamber has a bare floor littered with old boots and walls hung with grimy clothes. There are a few stools and a table made from an old barrel head. The front door is fitted with a bell.

Creatures: Three mill hands lounge here most of the time. Ostensibly, they assist Cloten with handling and milling grain. Actually, they're his hired thugs. A dire rat lies concealed in a nearby pile of dirty boots.

THUGS (3) **CR 2**

Male human warrior 3
NE Medium humanoid
Init +0; **Senses** Spot +0, Listen +0
Languages Common

AC 16, touch 10, flat-footed 16
hp 16 (3 HD)
Fort +4 **Ref** +1 **Will** +1

Spd 20 ft.
Melee warhammer +5 (1d8+1/x3)
Ranged dagger +3 (1d4+1/19–20)
Base Atk +3; **Grp** +4
Atk Option Cleave, Power Attack
Combat Gear *potion of cure light wounds*

Abilities Str 13, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 8, Wis 11, Cha 9
Feats Cleave, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (warhammer)
Skills Climb +2, Intimidate +5

Possessions combat gear, scale mail, heavy wooden shield, warhammer

Dire Rat: hp 5, *Monster Manual* 64.

Tactics: The thugs make a show of answering the door if the PCs knock. They claim that the miller is out inspecting the fields, and ask any visitors to come back tomorrow if they have no grain to grind. If Ghini is with the PCs (see area **3**), they pretend to be happy to see her but maintain that the miller is not at home.

The thugs are fully aware that Cloten is a wererat, and they don't care. They attack to kill if the PCs try to force their way into the mill. If the PCs notice the hiding rat, the thugs claim it's their dog. If combat breaks out, the thugs and the rat charge the PCs and attempt to overwhelm them.

Development: If Cloten hears fighting break out here, he joins the fray after two rounds. If the PCs spot Cloten in his hybrid form or witness him change shape, the militia captain, Ghini, gladly arrests him. If the PCs kill Cloten without Ghini's prior approval, they might have a hard time keeping themselves out of jail. Cloten is a villain, but he's also an important citizen and in Baron Aulbes's employ. A few dire rat corpses, the ledgers from area **4C**, or the testimony of any surviving thugs goes a long way toward proving that the group did Aulbesmil a favor by eliminating the miller.

4B. Kitchen

This filthy chamber has a table cluttered with food scraps, four chairs, a fireplace, a counter, and a few cabinets. Every surface is grimy and greasy. Dirty rushes cover the floor.

4C. Study (EL 4)

This plain chamber contains a sofa, a writing desk, and a bookshelf.

Creatures: During the daylight hours, Cloten splits his time between this chamber, where he sits and plans his next crime, and the bedchamber (area **4D**). At night he usually skulks about the town in dire rat form, looking for his next victim.

CLOTEN, HYBRID FORM **CR 4**

Male human wererat aristocrat 1/rogue 2
Monster Manual 64, 170
CE Medium humanoid (shapechanger)
Init +9; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Spot +9, Listen +9
Languages Common, Orc

AC 23, touch 16, flat-footed 18
hp 18 (3 HD); **DR** 5/silver
Fort +4 **Ref** +11 **Will** +9; evasion

Spd 30 ft
Melee mwk rapier +7 (1d6/19–20) and claw +1 (1d4) and bite +1 (1d6) or
Ranged shortbow +6 (1d6/x3)
Base Atk +1; **Grp** +1
Atk Options sneak attack +1d6
Combat Gear *potion of cat's grace, potion of cure light wounds, potion of cure moderate wounds, potion of magic fang*, tanglefoot bag, smokestick

Abilities Str 10, Dex 21, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 14
SQ alternate form, lycanthropic empathy, trapfinding
Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Persuasive, Stealthy, Weapon Finesse
Skills Bluff +9, Control Shape +8, Diplomacy +4, Disguise +6 (+8 acting), Escape Artist +7, Handle Animal +7, Hide +8, Intimidate +6, Listen +9, Move Silently +9, Profession (miller) +4, Ride +7, Sense Motive +4, Sleight of Hand +6, Spot +9
Possessions combat gear, leather armor, +1 *buckler*, masterwork rapier, shortbow with 20 arrows, *cloak of resistance* +1, *ring of protection* +1, strongbox key, 15 gp

Alternate Form (Su) In human form Cloten's statistics change as follows:
CE Medium humanoid (shapechanger)
Init +6
AC 18, touch 12, flat-footed 16
hp 15 **DR** none
Fort +3 **Ref** +8
Melee mwk rapier +4 (1d6/19–20)
Ranged shortbow +3 (1d6/x3)
Abilities Dex 15, Con 10
Skills Escape Artist +4, Hide +5, Move Silently +6, Ride +4, Slight of Hand +3

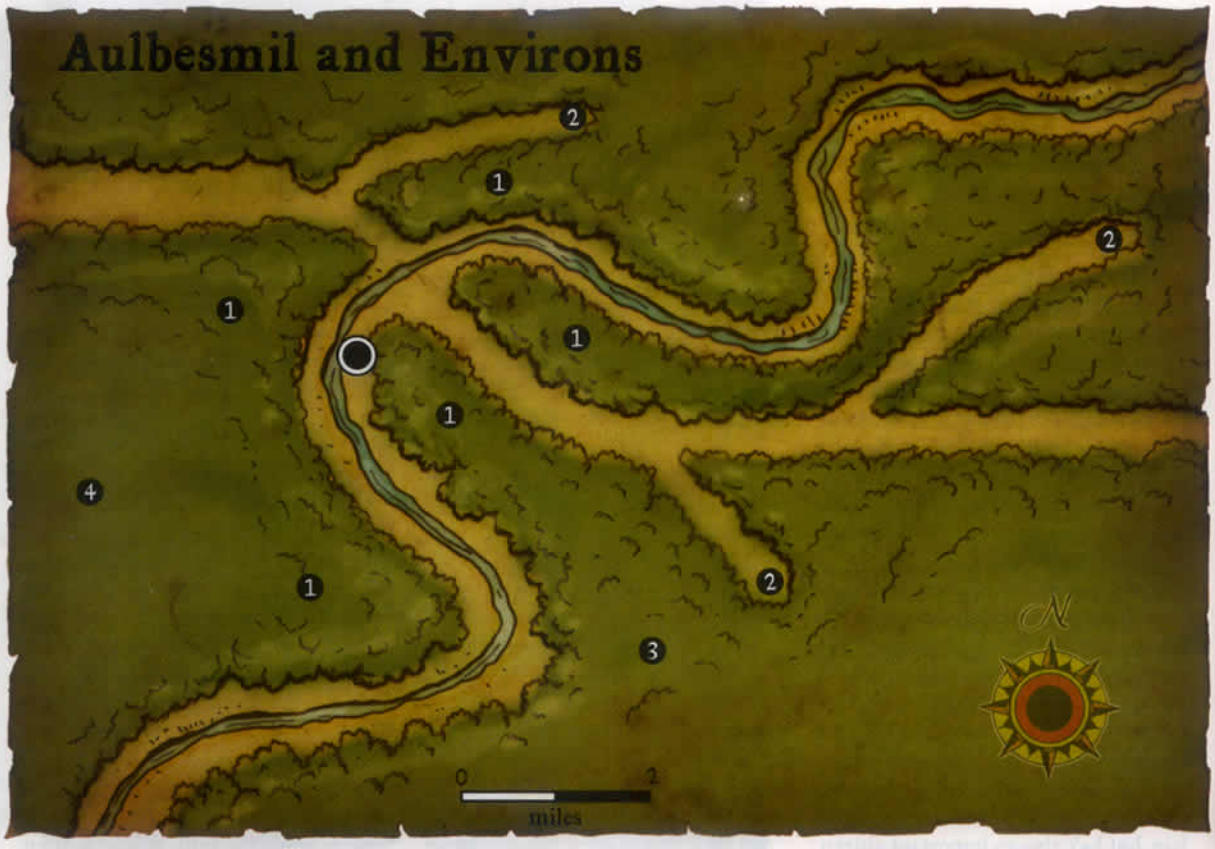
Alternate Form (Su) In dire rat form Cloten's statistics change as follows:
CE Small animal (shapechanger)
AC 19, touch 16, flat-footed 14
Fort +3 **Ref** +10 **Will** +8
Spd 40 ft., climb 20 ft.
Melee bite +7 (1d4 plus disease)
Special Atks disease
Skills Climb +13, Hide +12, Swim +13
Possessions Cloten cannot use any of his possessions while in dire rat form

Tactics: Cloten prefers to fight in hybrid form. He tries to pick out a weak opponent and knock that character out of the fight quickly with his rapier and bite attacks. He's always on the lookout for sneak attack opportunities. If he has time to prepare for battle, he drinks his *potion of magic fang* to make his bite attack more formidable. Though not terribly brave, Cloten's recent successes have made him feel invulnerable and he fights to the death. If he feels himself in danger, however, he goes looking for reinforcements.

Development: If any fighting breaks out in the mill, Cloten quickly drinks his *potion of magic fang* and goes to repel the attackers.

The bookcase holds a few short volumes on geography, history, and lycanthropy, but most of the books are old ledgers from the mill, mostly written in Cloten's hand. The ledgers show the amount of grain taken in and the flour produced from it, along with all the mill's day-to-day expenses. All seems correct and orderly in the ledgers; however, the numbers are faked. Cloten has been cheating the local farmers, just as they suspect. He skims off about 15% of all the flour the mill produces and sells it in other towns. He used disappearing ink to make notes showing the actual amount of grain and flour that passes through the mill. The PCs can read these notes if they examine the ledgers using the reading glass from the desk. The most recent ledger also includes figures for Cloten's ill-gotten gains as a wererat. The numbers include notes of the hauls from Durmain's caravan (see area **1**) and from the late militia captain. These notes also show that Cloten gave half the proceeds to someone called Largo.

There also is an incomplete entry headed "Lysander," along with a list of Lysander's possessions and their sale values. There



is an additional blank entry labeled "ransom." This refers to Lysander's capture (see area 4 in the Aulbesmil Environs section). These ledgers, along with Cloten (alive or dead), would go a long way toward clearing up the strange events in Aulbesmil.

If the PCs uncover the information about Lysander from Cloten's ledger, Ghini immediately sends them to the hunting lodge to investigate. The captain would go herself, but she does not know exactly what is going on and doesn't want to risk leaving the town undefended in case Cloten has hidden allies that might attack.

If Cloten realizes that the PCs suspect him, he might try a preemptive attack against them at the inn or their campsite. If so, he leaves his thugs on guard here and brings four dire rats to assist him.

Treasure: The sofa is soft and comfortable, but is otherwise unremarkable. The desk contains writing materials (including several bottles of pale green ink), a supply of candles (these have gone mostly unused since Cloten became a lycanthrope), a disguise kit (well used), and a reading glass with an emerald-tinted lens. The bottle contains a special disappearing ink worth 75 gp. Once dry, it can only be read through a lens with the correct green tint. Cloten's reading glass can be used to read the vanishing ink, and it is worth 150 gp.

Ad-hoc Experience Award: If the PCs successfully retrieve the information from Cloten's ledgers, give them experience as if they had defeated a CR 3 creature in combat.

4D. Cloten's Bedchamber

This bedchamber reeks of blood, sweat, and unwashed linens. There is a fine bed with a canopy, but the bedclothes have been twisted into an untidy nest. An armoire and chest of drawers hold some clothing, but most of it has been strewn across the floor.

Treasure: Under the bed, Cloten keeps a locked strongbox that holds the proceeds from his legitimate enterprises. The strongbox holds 200 gp, 25 pp, three bloodstones worth 50 gp each, and four doses of oil of taggit.

Strongbox: Hardness 8; hp 45; break DC 26, Open Lock DC 20.

4E. Warehouse

Large sacks of grain are piled along one wall of this large warehouse, directly across from similar sacks of flour. The floor is bare except for a large trap door in the center of the room.

The double doors leading into this room are kept barred from the inside at all times. The trap door in the floor allows Cloten to dump grain into the millstone in area 4F.

The room holds about a dozen sacks of milled flour and two dozen sacks of grain. Cloten supposedly holds this material for the baron, but he is planning to keep about half of it for himself.

Warehouse Doors: 3 in. thick; Hardness 5; hp 30; Break DC 22.

4F. Milling Chamber (EL 3)

This chamber sits right down at water level. A great millstone, along with shafts and gears that connect it to the undershot waterwheel outside, take up most of the space. An iron lever juts from the floor next to the north wall.

The lever in the floor starts and stops the wheel.

Creatures: Two more of Cloten's thugs are here most of the day, working the grindstone. Three dire rats, more of Cloten's pets, lurk under the grindstone when it's not turning.

Thugs (2): hp 16 each, see page 22.

Dire Rats (3): hp 5 each, *Monster Manual* 64.

Tactics: No one is allowed in this room without the permission of Cloten. Both the thugs and the rats assume any intruders are hostile unless they are accompanied by the wererat and attack immediately.

Treasure: Cloten keeps his ill-gotten gains stashed in the rat's nest under the grindstone. It takes a DC 15 Search check to locate the entrance to the nest; the PCs gain a +5 bonus on the check if they saw the dire rats emerging from under the millstone. A Small character can wiggle into the nest with little effort. A Medium character can squeeze in with a DC 30 Escape Artist check.

Inside, the characters find a suit of masterwork chainmail, 450 gp, six peridots (50 gp each), and a silver armband with onyx and gold inlay (115 gp).

Development: The denizens of this room don't emerge to join a fight elsewhere unless Cloten calls them forth, and he must be in here or in area 4E to do that.

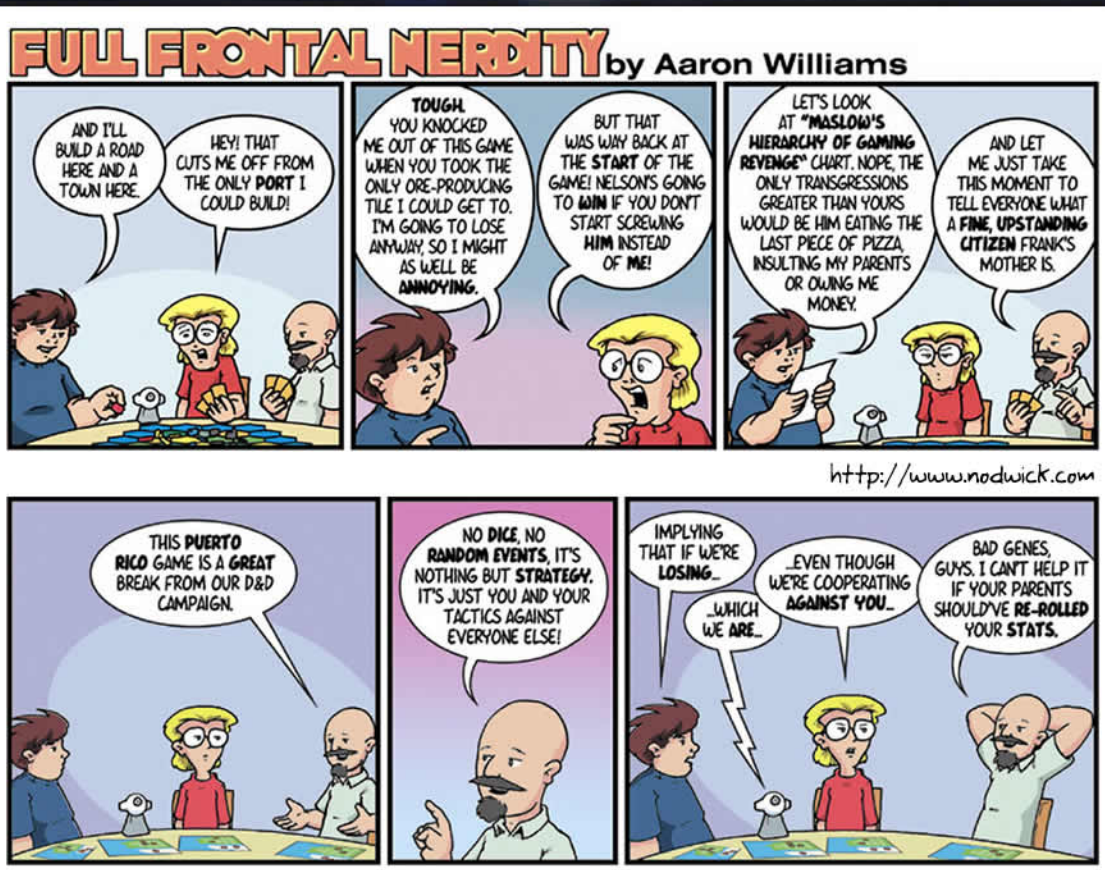
AULBESMIL ENVIRONS

A band of farmland a few miles wide surrounds Aulbesmil, and is in turn surrounded by dense forest. If the PCs explore the countryside, they'll find several areas of interest.

1. Farmsteads

Most farmers around Aulbesmil live in the town and go out to work their fields each day. A few outlying farms have walled farmyards with a house, a barn, and a few storage sheds.

During daylight hours the farmers are out working, and quickly spot and greet anyone who openly approaches their farmsteads. The farmers have the same information as the patrons at the Sylvan Glade Inn (area 1 in the Town of Aulbesmil section). They also know that Lysander is in the area because he spent a few days visiting the farms and camps on his way into town. Lysander asked the farmers to keep the news of his visit quiet, so the farmers won't mention it unless the PCs mention the young man by name. If they do, the farmers tell the PCs they haven't seen Lysander for a few days, which probably means he's staying out of sight.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AND I'LL BUILD A ROAD HERE AND A TOWN HERE.
HEY! THAT CUTS ME OFF FROM THE ONLY PORT I COULD BUILD!
TOUGH. YOU KNOCKED ME OUT OF THIS GAME WHEN YOU TOOK THE ONLY ORE-PRODUCING TILE I COULD GET TO. I'M GOING TO LOSE ANYWAY, SO I MIGHT AS WELL BE ANNOYING.
BUT THAT WAS WAY BACK AT THE START OF THE GAME! NELSON'S GOING TO WIN IF YOU DON'T START SCREWING HIM INSTEAD OF ME!
LET'S LOOK AT "MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF GAMING REVENGE" CHART. NOPE, THE ONLY TRANSGRESSIONS GREATER THAN YOURS WOULD BE HIM EATING THE LAST PIECE OF PIZZA, INSULTING MY PARENTS OR OWING ME MONEY.
AND LET ME JUST TAKE THIS MOMENT TO TELL EVERYONE WHAT A FINE, UPSTANDING CITIZEN FRANK'S MOTHER IS.
http://www.nodwick.com
THIS PUERTO RICO GAME IS A GREAT BREAK FROM OUR D&D CAMPAIGN.
NO DICE, NO RANDOM EVENTS, IT'S NOTHING BUT STRATEGY. IT'S JUST YOU AND YOUR TACTICS AGAINST EVERYONE ELSE!
IMPLYING THAT IF WE'RE LOSING...
...WHICH WE ARE...
...EVEN THOUGH WE'RE COOPERATING AGAINST YOU...
BAD GENES, GUYS. I CAN'T HELP IT IF YOUR PARENTS SHOULD'VE RE-ROLLED YOUR STATS.

2. Work Camps

These locations mark cabins or temporary campsites where people work at tapping the forest's bounty. The workers include lumberjacks, charcoal makers, trappers, and wild food gatherers (the forest produces berries, mushrooms, acorns, and other edibles at various times of the year).

During the day, most of the workers are in the forest and out of sight, leaving only one or two dogs at the camp. If the PCs poke around a little, they can locate the workers. These people have much the same information as the farmers do, and they also report that they've seen orcs lurking in the woods, though they haven't seen any recently. They suspect that whatever has been stalking people outside the town has begin preying on the orcs, and they're not sorry about that.

3. Owlbear Lair (EL 4)

A great tree has fallen across a rocky outcropping here, creating a natural shelter of sorts.

Creatures: A lone owlbear has moved in here. It's looking for a mate, but remains alone for the moment.

Owlbear: hp 52, *Monster Manual* 206.

Tactics: The owlbear attacks anything that ventures too close. When facing a group of foes, it tries to pick out an opponent without metal armor for its first attack. The owlbear uses improved grab at the beginning of the fight, but releases its prey and simply claws and bites if the PCs gang up on it. It fights to the death.

Development: Inside the lair, the PCs find numerous bones and a few corpses, all badly mauled and rotten. These bodies are actually Cloten's victims, dumped near the lair (the owlbear used to let Cloten's offerings lie in the forest, but has taken to dragging them here ever since Ghini, the militia captain, carried off her predecessor's body). The bodies are too far gone to reveal what killed them, but Cloten stripped them of everything valuable. Alert players might realize that the complete absence of valuables indicates that someone has tampered with the bodies.

4. The Hunting Lodge (EL 3)

The ancient building has a low ceiling, with log walls and a thatched roof.

The Aulbes family has kept a hunting lodge here for generations. Inside, the lodge has one room with areas for sleeping, eating, cooking, and processing game.

Lysander (LG male human aristocrat 1/ranger 1) came here about two weeks ago along with a few servants to see that the place was properly maintained and to investigate the killings in the Aulbesmil area.

Cloten got wind of Lysander's coming and sent a gang of orcs to attack the lodge. All Lysander's servants were killed. Fortunately for Lysander, the orcs had orders not to kill him.

Creatures: Lysander lies tied up in the center of the lodge, where his cap-

tors can keep an eye on him. The orcs are not gentile captors, and Lysander lies helpless, currently at 0 hit points. Five orc warriors survived the attack on the lodge.

Orc Warriors (5): hp 5 each; *Monster Manual* 203.

Tactics: One orc keeps watch outside the lodge at all times. The remaining orcs wait inside, sleeping, eating, or just loafing while they await new orders from Cloten. At the first sign of trouble, the orcs inside pair off and each group leaves by the front and back doors. They hope this tactic confuses their enemies. In battle the orcs throw their javelins at foes they can't reach, then move in and use their axes. The orcs flee if three or more of them fall in combat.

Treasure: Each orc has five shiny new gold pieces—a down payment from Cloten. In addition, an unlocked chest in the lodge contains gear looted from Lysander and his servants. This includes 5 suits of masterwork studded leather armor, 5 masterwork longswords, two *potions of cure light wounds*, two vials of antitoxin, and two vials of *silversheen*. If Lysander survives the fight, he insists that his equipment be returned to him, though he gives the PCs the potions and the *silversheen* and promises a further reward for his rescue.

Development: The orcs speak only Orc. If the PCs take prisoners and interrogate them in Orc, they happily spill their guts in return for freedom (they offer their shiny gold coins as an additional incentive). If the PCs agree, the orcs tell then that the "ratman" from town (Cloten) sent their chief a message and hired them to attack and capture the "pretty boy" here (Lysander). The orcs don't know how Cloten got his information, but their chief says the big rat is pretty well connected. All of what the orcs say is true, but they have no more information for the party.

If the PCs revive Lysander, he tells them that he was planning to visit Aulbesmil for some time, just to look after the lodge. He decided to come quietly, however, when he heard about the killings. Apparently, his mission wasn't as secret as he thought, because a few nights after he arrived the orcs attacked.

If the PCs return to Aulbesmil with Lysander in tow, Ghini quickly deputizes them to assist with Cloten's arrest (assuming the miller is still at large). She accompanies them to the mill if the PCs desire it, but allows them to take on Cloten themselves if they wish. In the latter case, she gives a fighting character her *silversheen*. Ghini does not allow Lysander to accompany the group. She orders Lysander to rest and to take command of the militia in case she does not return and Lysander reluctantly complies.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Once the PCs defeat Cloten and rescue Lysander the adventure is effectively over. If the owlbear is still in the area, Ghini urges the PCs to go and deal with it.

After some deliberation, Baron Aulbes agrees to allow the PCs to keep any treasures they found in the mill. They also receive 500 gp if they defeated the owlbear, along with a 500 gp reward from the baron for rescuing his nephew, and an additional 500 if they were able to kill or capture Cloten. In addition, each PC also receives a silver ring with the Aulbes crest (worth 20 gp) to signify the baron's favor.

The PCs may finish the adventure with one remaining unanswered question: Who is Largo? This person might be the wererat who infected Cloten or merely part of the criminal network Cloten had joined. The PCs might be able to pick up additional clues from Cloten's ledgers or simply by waiting at the mill until one of Cloten's criminal contacts comes calling.

Skip Williams hails from D&D's birthplace: Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. After 20 years or so working full-time in the game industry as a writer, game designer, editor, convention organizer, and magazine columnist, Skip is back in rural Wisconsin, where he keeps busy with a garden and orchard and occasionally concocts dastardly plots like the one in this adventure.

SCALING THE ADVENTURE

"Beasts of Aulbesmil" is designed for a party of four 3rd-level PCs, but with a little work it can be adapted for use by 1st–2nd-level characters or 4th–5th-level characters. Simply adjust all NPC character levels up or down as appropriate by a number equal to that which the average party level of your group deviates from 3. Don't forget to modify the amount of treasure found in the adventure appropriately. Specific changes to the adventure include:

1st–2nd-level PCs: Remove a thug from areas **4A** and **4F**, and reduce the number of dire rats in **4F** to 2. Cut the number of orcs in the hunting lodge in half, and replace the owlbear with a dire wolf.

4th–5th-level PCs: Make the thugs fourth-level fighters. Give Clotin 2 or 3 more rogue levels, and consider making him a werewolf rather than a wererat and replacing all the dire rats in the adventure with wolves (or even dire wolves). Give the orcs in the hunting lodge 2 or 3 fighter levels, and advance the owlbear by 4–6 Hit Dice (making it Huge).

THE HATEFUL LEGACY

BY GREG A. VAUGHAN
BY CYRIL VAN DER HAEGEN
BY ROBERT LAZZARETTI
GREYHAWK, MID-LEVEL (6TH–12TH), ALPINE FOREST

Deep within the forbidding reaches of the Barrier Peaks lies a mysterious forgotten valley. At the end of the Hateful Wars, an entire army of orcs and goblins fled into the valley with the treasures they had rescued from their abandoned homes. They were never seen again. Every attempt to recover the treasure has failed, for no one has ever returned from the hidden vale. Will your expedition succeed where the rest have been destroyed, or will you succumb to the horrifying reality of the valley's secret?

"The Hateful Legacy" is a D&D adventure for four 12th-level characters. It explores one of the forgotten legacies of the Hateful Wars. The adventure is set in the northern Barrier Peaks of the GREYHAWK campaign setting and uses materials from the old *GREYHAWK Adventures* hardback by James M. Ward published by TSR in 1988. The section in that book on Csipros Erd (the Geysers of Death) is an excellent read and provides a great deal of flavor for the back story, but is not necessary to run this adventure.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Scholars remember the Hateful Wars as a chapter in history in which the Small Folk drove the euroz (orcs) and jebli (goblins) from their homes in the Lortmil Mountains. If the war represents a chapter in history, then the fate of Sandor the Headstrong, prince of the Kettite province of Polvar, is a mere footnote. No fewer than two armies led by Lord Sandor pursued the fleeing savages through the Bramblewood Forest and into the valleys and foothills of the Barrier Peaks to retrieve the wagon-loads of treasure they brought into the mountains. The first army took horrible losses. The second disappeared entirely, along with the prince, and was never heard from again.

The evil now hidden in the valley of Csipros Erd originated centuries before the Hateful Wars, when a Baklunish druid named Kazgorva was thrown out of his enclave for his amoral and violent ways. His adherence to neutrality left no room for tolerance and led him to condemn all others whose philosophies did not agree with his own. Cast out by his fellow druids, he eventually discovered the valley of Csipros Erd, long abandoned by its original Flan inhabitants, and became its guardian. Unfortunately, he was unaware of the extent of the valley's geothermal activity and the toxic gasses that were released from sterile lakes within the valley whenever tremors occurred. Kazgorva died when one such tremor released the deadly gas

before he was of sufficient level to resist the poison. Slain by the very sanctuary he had chosen to protect, his body fell into one of the pools of bubbling mud.

The encasement of mud preserved the druid's body, and his own malevolent spirit leant it animation as he rose sometime later as a powerful druidic mummy lord and resumed his mission as protector of the valley. When the euroz and jebli fled into the valley pursued by Sandor's army, Kazgorva created a powerful earthquake that unleashed a great storm of gas that destroyed both forces. When the survivors of Sandor's force returned a few months later equipped to resist the poison gas, Kazgorva enlisted the aid of tribes of hill giants and ogres dwelling in the mountains surrounding the valley. This powerful giant force surprised and easily overwhelmed Sandor's expedition. To reward his minions, Kazgorva created another earthquake, releasing another torrent of gas and felling the giants who had so ably served their purpose. Once again his natural sanctuary was safe from intrusion. Eighty-four years have passed since the destruction of Lord Sandor, and trespassers have once again entered the valley.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The adventure begins as the characters arrive in the valley of Csipros Erd. An awakened dire ape ranger and his primeval animal minions wait to welcome the PCs, having just completed a mission outside the valley for the druid. After this, the characters locate the valley's entrance, itself guarded by an ancient Flan cliff dwelling now inhabited by a tribe of ogres led by a giant. The cliff dwellers hurl missiles at the party and toss boulders into the small sterile lakes at the cliff base. This introduces the party to the deadly gasses of the valley as a cloud is released in their midst.

Fighting their way past the cliff-dwelling giants, the party enters the valley proper and discovers clues about the tragedies that occurred here. At a century-old campsite, they find the remains of Sandor's second expedition and the giants who obliterated them. They also find that Sandor the Headstrong has not rested easy and now exists as an angel of decay, forever coveting the treasures that were denied him in life. Deeper in the valley they must contend with more geysers as well as the denizens of this lost world that have proven hardy enough to exist among the valley's poisonous emissions. Finally, they reach the old treasure wagons of the orcs and goblins, next to the geyser pool where Kazgorva lost his own life. Here they must deal with the mummy lord as well as his chief henchman, a vilewight who was once the orc shaman-chief that led his tribes to their fate in Csipros Erd. After sending these lost souls into oblivion, the party can finally close the last chapter of the Hateful Wars.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are several ways the party can become involved in this adventure.

- The party comes upon a burned-down inn on the Irafa Road as they travel through the Bramblewood Forest. All of the inn's patrons, including several adventurers, have been torn apart. Among them are a number of slain dire animals. The attack was fairly recent, and the PCs can track the perpetrators west through the forest until they catch up to them at the very entrance to the valley.
- Lord Sandor the Headstrong's legacy has not been completely forgotten. The current lord of Polvar discovered records of his predecessor's folly in the archives. Within were tantalizing hints of a great treasure that the former lord of Polvar sought on his "secret" expedition. The nobleman makes discreet inquiries into finding a group who can carefully investigate this legend. An influx of treasures would greatly benefit his province in its influence with the beygraf, but the lord does not want to tip off the Bisselites or the powerful Mouqallad merchant consortium and forfeit his claim. In this instance the party can be agents serving the lord of Polvar, spies for the Mouqallad who have caught wind of the lord's machinations or allies of the Knights of the Watch suspicious about reports of the covert gathering of troops in Polvar.
- The grand mufti of the Yatils received a vision and has declared that there exists a valley of death in the Barrier Peaks and that the master of this valley is anathema to the True Faith. In the name of the True Faith, this valley must be cleansed of its heresy. Many of the loyal followers sent by the grand mufti traveled to the Valley of the Mage and fruitlessly sacrificed their lives attempting to root out the archmage Jaran Krimeeah. The PCs, however, are instead sent to search the Bramblewood for a different valley.
- The dwarves of the Lortmils discovered through divination that an important religious icon (an anvil sacred to Moradin) lost in battle during the Hateful Wars was actually carried away by the orc lord, Urgush. They have managed to trace his flight across Bissel and through the Bramblewood Forest. However, they lost his trail where he entered the mysterious foothills of the Barrier Peaks. This hook works especially well if the party contains any of the Small Folk (dwarves, gnomes, or halflings).

CHAPTER ONE: THE MOUNTAIN PASS

The adventure begins as the party breaches the western fringe of the Bramblewood Forest at the foot of the Barrier Peaks. Up the slope lies a second thicket barring the entrance of the valley itself. Within this thicket the party runs afoul of one of Kazgorva's servitors and his animal minions.

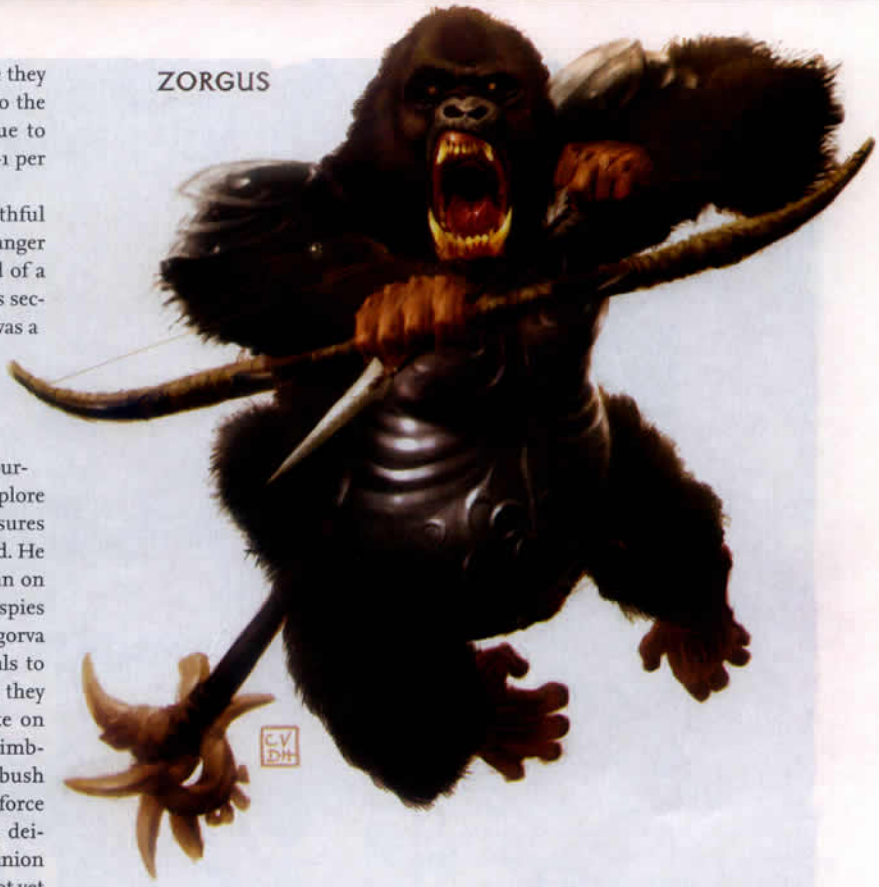
THE VALLEY ENTRANCE (EL 11)

A great cleft in the mountainside reveals a hidden valley entrance beyond a final thicket of trees. The slope climbs considerably and the thorn-laden yarpick trees are intermixed more and more with highland conifers.

As the party proceeds up the forested slope, a DC 20 Spot check reveals recent traces of blood on the foliage. If the party notices these, they are not surprised when ambushed by Zorgus and

his animal companions. Otherwise they must make Spot checks opposed to the ambushers' Hide checks (at +4 due to concealment in the undergrowth, +1 per 10 feet of distance).

Creatures: Kazgorva's most faithful servant is the awakened dire ape ranger Zorgus. The druid recently learned of a survivor of the ambush on Sandor's second expedition 84 years ago. This was a dwarf sentry who abandoned his post prior to the attack and disappeared into a distant dwarven hold beyond the druid's reach. Recently, the old dwarf steeled his courage and commissioned a party to explore the lost valley and recover the treasures that he imagined still lay unclaimed. He arranged to meet the party at an inn on the Irafa Road. The druid's animal spies kept tabs on his progress, and Kazgorva sent Zorgus with a force of animals to destroy the inn and all within. As they return from their successful strike on the inn, Zorgus spots the party climbing the slope and decides to ambush them. All that remains of Zorgus's force are two dire wolverines and three deinonychuses. Zorgus's animal companion was killed in the fight, and he has not yet taken the time to summon another one. His remaining minions all bear minor wounds from the previous engagement.



ZORGUS **CR 10**

Male awakened dire ape ranger 6
Monster Manual 62
N Large magical beast (augmented animal)
Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Spot +12, Listen +11
Language Common

AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 19
hp 112 (13 HD, currently 99)
Fort +13 **Ref** +12 **Will** +7

Spd 30 ft. climb 15 ft.
Melee mwk greatclub +19/+14/+9 (2d8+9) and bite +13 (1d8+3) or
2 claws +18 (1d6+6) and bite +13 (1d8+3)
Ranged mwk composite longbow +15/+10/+5 (2d6+6/x3) or
mwk composite longbow +13/+13/+8/+3 (2d6+6/x3) or
mwk composite longbow +9/+9/+9 (2d6+6/x3)
Space 10 ft. **Reach** 10 ft.
Base Atk +13; **Grp** +23
Atk Options favored enemy +4 (humanoid [human]) +2 (giant), Improved Overrun, Manyshot, Power Attack
Special Atks rend 2d6+9
Combat Gear *potion of neutralize poison*
Ranger Spells Prepared (CL 3rd)
1st—*longstrider, speak with animals*

Abilities Str 22, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 10
SQ wild empathy +6
Feats Alertness, Endurance, Improved Overrun, Iron Will, Manyshot, Power Attack, Rapid Shot, Toughness, Track
Skills Climb +14, Hide +7, Jump +8, Listen +11, Move Silently +9, Spot +12, Survival +10
Possessions +1 *mithral breastplate*, masterwork greatclub, masterwork composite longbow (+6 Str bonus) with 27 arrows

Deinonychuses (3): hp 34 each (currently 32, 28, and 21); *Monster Manual* 60.

Dire Wolverines (2): hp 45 each (currently 41 and 40): *Monster Manual* 66.

Tactics: When he spots the party, Zorgus casts *speak with animals* to better coordinate tactics and *longstrider* on himself. He then climbs a nearby tree, using its branches for concealment, and readies his bow. The ambush begins when deinonychuses and dire wolverines charge from opposite sides of the trail to flank the party. Zorgus uses his bow to snipe at any open targets (readying to disrupt spellcasting as necessary). If the battle turns against his companions, he leaps the 30 feet from his perch (using Jump to try to lessen the falling damage). The party briefly catches sight of an armored dire ape swinging a greatclub before the mayhem truly begins. All of these creatures willingly give their lives rather than allow anyone to enter their valley.

The Rock Tower
Inset Map
valley entrance
The Rock Tower
area 1
One square=100ft
250 ft
200 ft
100 ft
0
Sideview
N
open to area 7 below
open to area 2 below
9
9
10
7
8
6
5
3
2
4
1
one square=10 feet

THE ROCK TOWER

The entrance to the valley is a narrow gap between two jagged outcroppings of the flanking mountains. Atop the northern outcrop stands a high tower of natural rock. Within this formation are natural hollows that were inhabited long ago by a cliff-dwelling Flan tribe. The remnants of their dwellings still exist in the rock shelters and spire. Now, however, it is occupied by a tribe of ogres, descendants of the tribes that helped Kazgorva destroy Sandor's expedition so long ago. They remain here above the valley's entrance, but superstitious dread prevents them from making more than infrequent visits to the valley itself to hunt. A hill giant chieftain leads the ogres. They guard the valley's entrance and attack any who try to pass below other than the native animal inhabitants of the valley.

The valley entrance becomes a narrow corridor between two rocky cliffs. At the base of the cliffs are two small, clear lakes. A path threads its way between the cliffs and the lakes into the valley beyond. On the northern cliff, a hundred feet above, stands a tall spire of rock—a natural tower soaring above the vale like a watching sentinel.

The two lakes seem to contain pure water, but are actually tainted. Anyone drinking from them must make a DC 17 Fortitude save or become poisoned (initial damage 1d6 Con; secondary damage 1d6 Con). A character can make a DC 15 Survival check to recognize the taint in the water and warn others away from drinking it. Unless the party has approached under a cloak of *invisibility* or is actively hiding, the watchers in the rock tower automaticly notice them and the ogres and hill giant prepare to attack as described under area 1 below.

1. CLIFF DWELLINGS (EL 12 OR 15)

It appears that some ancient race once lived beneath this rock overhang on the cliff face. The lip of the cliff still holds the remnants of a low rock wall, and at the back of the rock shelter are the crumbling remains of several mud-brick dwellings, including at least one pit house. A sturdy ladder of rough logs lashed together with ropes leads down to a path hugging the cliff as it travels deeper into the valley. A fissure through the rock wall at the back of the shelter leads upward with steps crudely chiseled into the stone.

This rock shelter is no longer used as a dwelling, but the ogre tribe currently inhabiting the area does use it as a defensive position from which to attack those in the valley below. The crumbling dwellings have long since been stripped of anything valuable or useful other than the dried remains of an old hemp-fiber sandal or the chipped core of a stone tool. The path to the west hugs the cliff face for several miles, traveling along the upper slopes of the valley and into the mountains; it does not descend into the valley. The ogres use this track for hunting and gathering. A DC 15 Survival check identifies many old giant tracks coming and going. The cliff is 100 feet above the valley floor, and the trail below passes between the

cliff base and the lakes. The cliffs are of crumbling stone and require a DC 20 Climb check to scale.

Creatures: There are always five ogres on guard duty here, day or night. These ogres are members of the warrior society in area **5** and bear ritual tattoos and markings on their faces and bodies. If the tribe has been alerted to the approach of intruders, the hill giant chief is also present (this raises the EL to 15). When the ogres spy intruders in the valley, they wait until they are between the first lake and the rock face to begin firing their shortbows. They are too large to receive cover from the low walls. The hill giant takes chunks of the crumbling rock wall and throws them into the lakes below (no attack roll necessary). As the boulders disturb the lakebeds, a release of poison gas is triggered. This colorless, odorless gas rises from the lake surface to settle onto the trails around the lakes . The poison covers the entire valley entrance in an invisible cloud 500 feet long and 40 feet high for 6 hours. The effect of this gas is equivalent to a *cloudkill* spell (DC 20), though it settles over the lakes, which are the lowest points in the area, rather than moving. After having thrown a couple rocks into each lake, the hill giant tires of the exercise and returns to area **10** to let the ogres finish off any survivors unless the party has made it up to this level. After the lakes release their gas, their waters turn blood red in color for several weeks.

Ogre Barbarian 4 (5): hp 79 each; *Monster Manual* 199. They have shortbows with 20 arrows each instead of javelins: +6/+1 ranged (1d8/×3).

Mulligorb: hp 213; see area **9**.

2. OGRE VILLAGE (EL 16 IF ALARM IS SOUNDED)

At the base of the rock spire to the east is a small box canyon. Here are more of the mud-brick dwellings of the ancient builders. Carved stairs lead away through narrow crevices in the rock to the west and north. A heavy wooden gate secured from this side bars the northern stair. Beside the gate is a two-story tower of the same mud-brick construction pierced with windows on its upper floor. To the south a small cave opens in the rock wall. At the eastern end of the canyon is a ledge twenty feet high with a hollow in the rock face behind it. A wooden ladder provides access to this ledge. The remnants of old cook fires and shards of broken pottery litter the ground.

This was the main village of the ancient Flan builders and now serves the same purpose for the ogre tribe. The ogres fear their chieftain's pet in area **7** and have erected the gate of rope and logs to prevent it from entering the village proper. An ogre always sits as lookout atop the tower in area **3** and shouts an alarm if it spies anyone entering the village. If they hear the alarm, the inhabitants assume the spinosaurus from area **7** has broken in and react accordingly. In this case the shaman and his servants remain in the tower (area **3**) to defend it from within. The ogres of the warrior society (area **5**) charge out to do battle while the ogres in area **6** pull up the ladder to defend their ledge. If still alive, the hill giant emerges on the ledge in area **9** and pelts intruders with thrown rocks.

Wooden Gate: 8 in. thick logs lashed together with heavy 4-in.-thick rope; Hardness 0; hp 8; Break DC 23. (The gate has low hit points because the ropes securing the logs together can easily be cut to disassemble it.)

3. SHAMAN'S TOWER (EL 9)

The original Flan inhabitants of the canyon built this tower of stone and mud bricks. The tower stands 30 feet high, and the only entrance is a square hole cut in the tower's stone roof. A ladder stored within the tower is lowered when the inhabitants wish to allow anyone entry. The tower has two levels above ground. Each is 15 feet high. The floor of the second level is composed of cut logs, their ends protruding beyond the tower's outer wall. Ladders connect each of the levels through a hole cut in the floor. The second level of the tower has three small windows cut in the walls 20 feet above the ground. A sub floor exists beneath the tower. This low-ceilinged chamber is accessible through a secret trapdoor in the floor above (DC 20 Search check to locate), and a short ladder descends to the floor 7 feet below. This chamber was a kiva used by the original Flan inhabitants, a circular ceremonial chamber below the ground. The walls of this room have been scraped clean of the original artwork and decorated with crude charcoal drawings of the ogre deity Vaprak the Destroyer.

Stone and Mud Brick Walls: 2 ft. thick; Hardness 7; hp 120; Break DC 30; Climb DC 18.

Creatures: The tower is currently inhabited by an ogre mage named Karbul who serves as the tribe's shaman, though he does not actually have any divine spellcasting abilities. Serving him are three ogre "adepts" who are nothing more than typical members of their species. Karbul once ruled the tribe as the power behind the throne, but when Mulligorb slew the previous chief and took control the shaman found himself left out of the power structure. He and his adepts defend their village, but if adventurers go directly after the chieftain Karbul stands aside and may even assist them if the odds look favorable or he has the opportunity to broker an arrangement. In defense of the tower, the adepts hurl javelins through the second floor windows (gaining cover from below), and Karbul alternates between using offensive spell-like abilities and becoming invisible on the tower roof.

Karbul, male ogre mage tribal shaman: hp 47; *Monster Manual* 200.

Ogres (3): hp 29 each; *Monster Manual* 199.

Treasure: Stashed in the hidden kiva at the base of the tower are the treasures Karbul has managed to keep from Mulligorb's scrutiny. They consist of 12 gold ingots worth 50 gp each, 3 chrysoberyls worth 100 gp each, a bag of powdered diamonds worth 1,000 gp, a ceremonial shield made from part of a monstrous scorpion carapace inset with chips of amethyst and onyx worth 50 gp, and a *lesser strand of prayer beads.*

4. ANCIENT BURIAL (EL 4)

This dim, cool cave seems a silent sanctuary in this ogre-infested canyon. Ancient whorls and animistic patterns decorate the walls in fading ochre. A low ledge carved into the east wall holds a still humanoid form wrapped in the tattered remnants of a rough blanket. A tantalizing glimpse of copper jewelry set with precious stones and the glint of gold sparkles through tears in the ancient fabric.

This cave looks like an undisturbed ancient Flan burial chamber. Actually this cave is nothing more than the ogre tribe's garbage disposal. The ancient pictographs are authentic, but nothing else is as it seems.

Creature: The occupant of this small cave is a mimic. It is an extremely old specimen that actually lived when the Flan were still here. From them it learned to create its present shape as the corpse, stone ledge, and a portion of the surrounding wall. Being old and sleepy it is content to subsist on the garbage that the ogres throw in here. It is more than happy, however, to dine on any fresher fare that presents itself.

Mimic: hp 68; *Monster Manual* 186.

Treasure: Concealed beneath the mimic are actual Flan treasures it has hoarded for centuries: an ancient beaded mask with copper and obsidian inlays worth 150 gp, a copper ceremonial knife worth 25 gp, a jade pectoral incised with the image of a dire bear worth 275 gp, and a hematite mirror with 13 tiny fire opals cemented into small holes drilled around its perimeter worth 2,800 gp.

5. WARRIOR SOCIETY LODGE (EL 13)

This low structure of mud bricks has seen many repairs and has a new roof of wooden poles. Above its two doorways are the skulls of some large horned lizard or dragon decorated with feathers and painted with ritualistic designs in ochre.

This refurbished Flan dwelling serves as the lodge for the warrior society of this ogre tribe. It is separated into four chambers, two of which have been cut into the rock wall behind the lodge. Four or five ogre barbarians share space in each of the chambers, which are festooned with all sorts of totems, fetish items, and medicine amulets.

Creatures: The warrior society consists of nineteen heavily tattooed ogre barbarians, but there are only seven here at any one time; at least four of these are always asleep. Five more of the ogres are always on guard at the cliffs (area **1**), one in the watch post (area **10**), one in the lower caves (area **8**), and the rest out hunting. If an alarm is raised, the three wakeful ogres emerge ready for battle in two rounds. The sleeping ogres emerge in four rounds (they sleep in their armor as part of their society's code). The members of the lodge have foresworn material possessions, so they have no real valuables other than their equipment.

Ogre Barbarian 4 (7): hp 79 each; see area **1**.

6. TRIBAL SHELTER (EL 9)

A wooden ladder climbs twenty feet to a natural rock shelter in the canyon wall. The rocky overhang is stained black with the smoke from generations of cook fires. Crude scribblings of animals and esoteric shapes adorn the walls, though it is unclear if the current inhabitants or much older occupants drew them. Furs and debris litter the floor. A rock stair cut into the wall rises to the east.

This rock shelter serves as the communal living quarters for the members of the ogre tribe who are not part of the warrior society and do not serve as adepts to the shaman. The entire place is a smelly mess of past fires, the remains of meals, poorly made pottery, and unwashed clothing. The wall to the ledge can be climbed with a DC 15 Climb check.

Creatures: A total of 35 male and female ogres inhabit this area, though only nine of them should be considered combatants. The rest are young children, the aged, or the sick and infirm. Those capable of combat do not get involved in any engagements in area **2**. Rather they pull up the ladder, huddle the noncombatants into the back of the rock shelter, and throw javelins at any who try to surmount the ledge. If their attitude can be changed from unfriendly to helpful, they allow characters to pass by unmolested if they go straight to the stairs leading to area **10**.

Ogres (9): hp 29 each; *Monster Manual* 199.

Treasure: The meager treasures that this isolated tribe has managed to collect are spread around this area and consist of 435 gp, 1,100 sp, 690 cp, a dozen moss agates worth 10 gp each, a strangely irregular blood red freshwater pearl worth 150 gp for its unique appearance, two nice dire bear pelts worth 200 gp each, and a finely painted piece of ancient Flan pottery that has somehow survived intact worth 2,500 gp to a collector.

7. BOX CANYON (EL 13)

A sloping draw down from the mountains opens into this box canyon. Trees and shrubs grow along the fringes, and the light soil supports sturdy grasses. All is not right in this idyllic setting, however. The rock walls show scarring from what appear to be claw marks twenty feet up, and the half-eaten remains of a freshly killed grizzly bear dangle from the top branches of a pine tree.

The northern slope leads higher into the mountains. A successful DC 15 Survival check locates a scattering of Gargantuan lizardlike tracks, and a DC 25 Knowledge (nature) check can identify them as those of a bipedal dinosaur much larger than even a tyrannosaurus. Two openings cut through the stone walls of the box canyon are located behind concealing scrub brush and trees. These can be located with a DC 13 Search check. A DC 30 Spot check notices a window in the face of the rock spire 100 feet above.

Creature: This dell serves as the abode of Mulligorb's erstwhile pet, a spinosaurus—the last of its kind in the valley. Mulligorb has managed to lure it into lairing here by leaving fresh kills for it to devour. The dinosaur is currently out hunting in the mountains and valley below, but there is a cumulative 20% chance that it returns each round the

party spends in this area. The dinosaur stands over 40 feet tall and walks bipedally, though its longer arms allow it to move as a quadruped as well. A large, sail-like, ribbed fin rises from its back, and it has a long head with sharp teeth set into its crocodilelike jaw. It begins its attack by using its bellow, which alerts Mulligorb. If he still lives, he climbs down to area **8** to join the guard there and await the party.

SPINOSAURUS **CR 13**
Monster Manual II 72
N Gargantuan animal
Init +1; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Spot +18, Listen +17
AC 16, touch 7, flat-footed 15
hp 210 (20 HD)
Fort +18 **Ref** +13 **Will** +8
Spd 40 ft.
Melee bite +25 (3d8+13) and 2 claws +22 (3d6+6)
Space 20 ft. **Reach** 20 ft.
Base Atk +15; **Grp** +40
Atk Options improved grab (bite)
Special Atks bellow (DC 20), swallow whole, trample (DC 33; 2d8+19)
Abilities Str 36, Dex 13, Con 23, Int 2, Wis 15, Cha 10
Feats Alertness, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Improved Natural Attack (claw), Multiattack, Power Attack, Snatch, Weapon Focus (bite)
Skills Listen +18, Spot +17
Bellow (Ex) When a spinosaurus bellows (a standard action), it inspires terror in all creatures within 30 feet that have fewer Hit Dice. Each opponent must make a DC 20 Will save or become shaken for 5d6 rounds. A creature that successfully saves is immune that spinosaurus's bellow for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based.
Swallow Whole (Ex) A spinosaurus can swallow a grabbed opponent that is at least two size categories smaller than itself with a successful grapple check. Once inside, the opponent takes 2d8+10 points of bludgeoning damage plus 1d8+4 points of acid damage each round. A creature can climb back into the spinosaurus's mouth by making a successful grapple check. Alternatively, a swallowed opponent can cut its way out by dealing 25 points of damage to the gullet (AC 20) with a light slashing or piercing weapon. Once the creature escapes, muscular action closes the hole, another swallowed creature must cut its own way out. A spinosaurus's gullet can hold 2 Large, 8 Medium, 32 Small, or 128 Tiny or smaller opponents.
Trample (Ex) As a standard action the spinosaurus can trample opponents that are at least one size category smaller than itself. This attack deals 2d8+19 bludgeoning damage as the dinosaur moves over the creature. A trampled opponent can attempt either an attack of opportunity at a –4 penalty or a DC 33 Reflex save for half damage.

8. LOWER CAVES (EL 7 OR 15)

This series of small caves leads to a natural shaft that penetrates the center of the rock spire. A ladder of extremely thick wooden poles ascends 90 feet to area **9** above. The floor of this area is always damp with small puddles, since rain falls down the shaft all the way from area **10** and collects here, evaporating slowly in the cool cave.

Creatures: A single ogre from the warrior society stands guard here. It is terrified of the spinosaurus and will not leave the rearmost room for fear that the dinosaur will try to squeeze in after it. If Mulligorb has been alerted by the dinosaur he descends here to stand with the ogre against any intruders, raising the EL of the room to 15.

Ogre Barbarian 4: hp 79; see area 1.

Mulligorb: hp 213; see area 9.

9. CHIEFTAIN'S TOWER (EL 15)

Stairs curve upward through the rock for sixty feet before entering a natural cave that has been enlarged to its current dimensions, with a twenty-foot-high ceiling. A wide ledge looks out over the village eighty feet below, and a natural window in the rock, roughly three feet wide by five feet high, looks out over another small canyon one hundred feet down. The ladder from the lower caves rises through a hole in the floor of a small side cave, with another ladder rising forty feet to the very top of the rock spire.

These rooms once served as the home of the Flan tribal elders. The stumps of a few mud brick walls still remain, but the area's current inhabitant smashed these long ago. The ceiling of these caves is stained black with old soot, and several specimens of ancient Flan rock art still exist. Dire animal furs are strewn in the rear portion of the caves and serve as the giant's bedding and furniture. Bits of half-eaten food and less-identifiable remains have thoroughly soiled these pelts.

Creature: This series of caves now serves as the home of the hill giant chieftain, Mulligorb. His tactics are described at the various locations of this lair, but one of his favorites is to stand on his ledge and hurl rocks at intruders in area **2** below. He keeps a stash of several dozen rocks stacked on the ledge. He does not concern himself overmuch with the collateral damage caused by errant boulders smashing the roofs of his ogre servant's dwellings. If he is still alive when the party enters his lair, he rages and attempts to do battle on the ledge overlooking area **2**. If he can bring the combat to the precipice edge, he tries to bull rush or Awesome Blow the PCs over the edge.

MULLIGORB **CR 15**
Male hill giant barbarian 8
Monster Manual 123
CE Large giant
Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision; Spot +8, Listen +9
Languages Common, Giant
AC 24, touch 11, flat-footed 22; improved uncanny dodge
hp 209 (20 HD) **DR** 1/—
Fort +19 **Ref** +8 **Will** +7
Spd 50 ft.
Melee mwk greataxe +27/+22/+17/+12 (3d6+13/x3)
Ranged rock +18 (2d6+9)
Space 10 ft. **Reach** 10 ft.
Base Atk +17; **Grp** +30
Atk Options Awesome Blow, Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack
Special Atks rage 3/day

Abilities Str 28, Dex 14, Con 21, Int 11, Wis 8, Cha 9
SQ rock catching, trap sense +2
Feats Awesome Blow, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack, Iron Will, Weapon Focus (greataxe)
Skills Climb +16, Hide +4, Jump +16, Listen +9, Spot+8, Survival +9
Possessions masterwork chain shirt, masterwork greataxe, giant's bag

Rage (Ex) When Mulligorb rages, his statistics change as follows:
AC 22, touch 9, flat-footed 20
hp 249
Fort +21 **Will** +9
Melee mwk greataxe +29/+24/+19/+15 (3d6+16/x3)
Ranged rock +18 (2d6+11)
Grp +32
Abilities Str 32, Con 25
Skills Climb +18, Jump +18

Treasure: In the northeast corner of this cave complex is an ornately decorated trunk of magically-treated brass. Its panels are molded into scenes of dwarven miners working in a great subterranean city. The keyhole is in the gaping mouth of a stern-faced dwarven warrior. Mulligorb retrieved this trunk from the orc wains on a rare foray into the valley. The orcs, of course, stole it from the dwarves of the Lortmils at some time in the past. Mulligorb managed to locate the key as well, so he has never set off the Trap. The key is hidden behind a rock in area **10**. The trunk holds both the treasures Mulligorb originally found here in addition to those he has managed to collect over the years. These treasures include 800 gp, 3,500 sp, three black star sapphires worth 1,000 gp each, and a full suit of +1 *full plate* wrapped in silk worth 200 gp.

Trap: The brass trunk is trapped with an insanity mist vapor trap. If the chest is opened without using the proper key, a spray of insanity mist vapor fires from the seams of the chest filling a 10-foot-by-10-foot area.

Insanity Mist Vapor Trap: CR 8; mechanical; touch trigger; repair reset; gas; never miss; onset delay (1 round); poison (insanity mist, DC 15 Fortitude save resists, 1d4 Wis/2d6 Wis); multiple targets (all targets in a 10-ft.-by-10-ft. area); Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 20.

Magically-Treated Brass Trunk: 1 in. thick; Hardness 18; hp 75; Break DC 45; Open Lock 30.

10. WATCH POST (EL 7)

This high point is at the very tip of the rock tower, one hundred twenty feet above the village and two hundred fifty-five feet above the valley floor. It is little more than a flat mesa at the top of the spire, with a natural shaft running down its center. A ladder runs up this shaft providing access to this platform. The view is astonishing, providing the entire panorama of the forest below, the surrounding mountains, and even the valley itself. Though details are difficult to discern from this distance, several geysers of superheated water can be seen exploding from the rocks of the valley floor.

A DC 20 Spot check made while examining the valley notices some kind of flying creature (one of the harpies from area **C**). A DC 25 Search check reveals

a small niche in the rock concealed beneath a stone. Within is an ornate brass key with the bow fashioned to resemble a dwarf's head. This is the key to the hill giant's trunk in area **9** and bypasses the Trap if used.

Creature: One of the warrior society ogres is always stationed here, lying on its stomach so as to keep a low silhouette. It keeps watch over the approach to the valley, though it has a good field of view in any direction. If it spots anyone approaching, it shouts down the shaft to the hill giant who prepares the ambush described in area **1**. Even if combat occurs in the rest of the tribal complex, it does not leave its post, fearing the giant's wrath more than any intruders.

Ogre Barbarian 4: hp 79; see area **1**.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CSIPROS ERD

The Csipros Erd is an isolated valley on the extreme fringe of explored lands. Guarded by the expanse of the menacing Bramblewood Forest, located behind a hidden entrance in the midst of the forbidding Barrier Peaks and their many foothill valleys, and filled with many hazards—both natural and unnatural—the valley has remained inviolate since the coming of Kazgorva. The valley has been largely untouched by the outside world and remains a primeval sanctuary inhabited by beasts rarely seen in the outside world.

The valley is dotted with many active geysers. Some are obvious or surrounded by pools of boiling water and bubbling mud, but others lie concealed by the surrounding rocks and undergrowth until they burst forth suddenly in a scalding shower. Copses of hardy trees, mainly bristlecone pine, grow in the valley, but among them are the rotting remains of many fallen trunks, felled by hurricane-force winds released by massive explosions of gas from the lake at the valley's head. Eruptions of this magnitude only occur after major seismic events, the last such being when Sandor pursued the orcs and goblins into the valley in 510 CY (85 years ago). At that time the trunk of nearly every tree in the valley was snapped like a twig, though the flora has grown back significantly since then.

The walls of the valley climb steeply for several hundred feet into the lower reaches of the Barrier Peaks, though they can be scaled with relative ease (DC 10 Climb check). Most of the inhabitants of the valley are capable of making this climb and frequently hunt the slopes or retreat to the heights when tremors occur in order to escape the poisonous fumes in the valley below.

Every three hours spent in the valley there is a 20% chance of a random encounter. Roll d% and consult the table below if an encounter is indicated. These random encounters can occur in the surrounding mountains as well, but treat any result of a geyser as no encounter.

Roll	Result
01–04	Colossal monstrous scorpion
05–15	1d2 dire bears
16–20	2d4 ghasts
21–25	3d4 steam mephits
26–38	1d6+6 dire elk
39–50	Geyser
51–55	1d4+2 deinonychuses
56–70	Harpy archer
71–75	1d3 ogre barbarians
76–84	1d4+4 dire apes
85–90	3d4 ooze mephits
91–95	Tremor
96–00	Spinosaurus

Colossal Monstrous Scorpion: hp 300; *Monster Manual* 288. Several of these monsters call the valley home. They spend most of their time in rocky fissures at the mountain base but emerge to hunt.

Dire Bear: hp 105; *Monster Manual* 63. These beats hunt the dire elk of the valley and lower slopes. They are extremely aggressive.

Ghast: hp 29; *Monster Manual* 119. These wandering predators are all victims of the valley's poison gasses. They were originally either humans from Sandor's first army or orcs or goblinoids from Urgush's horde. They differ from typical ghasts in that rather than having the normal ghast stench, their bodies give off the poison gas of the valley. All within 10 feet must succeed on a DC 20 Fortitude save or suffer the effects as described under the Rock Tower above. This special attack increases their CR by +1.

Steam Mephit: hp 13; *Monster Manual* 184. These creatures inhabit the many geysers and boiling pools of the valley and only emerge to harass those nearby for sport. If half are killed, the others retreat. Their elemental physiology renders them immune to the poisons of the valley.

Dire Elk: hp 114; *Monster Manual II* 75. These great herd animals roam the valley and lower slopes in ever-dwindling numbers. They have become extremely aggressive as a result of the large number of predators in their habitat. There is a 50% chance that 1d2 of those encountered are calves, which the herd will protect at all costs. If you do not have access to *Monster Manual II* replace these with bison from the *Monster Manual* and double the number encountered.

Geyser (CR 3): These hidden hazards are not easily identifiable like those marked on the map. They could appear as either a simple pool of water or mud, or even as a small fissure in the ground. A DC 18 Spot check followed by a DC 15 Survival check notices the telltale signs and allows a PC to avoid the hazard altogether. Anyone coming within 20 feet of one of these locations triggers an eruption by the vibrations of their footsteps. These eruptions of steam last 1d4 rounds and deal 3d6 points of fire damage to anyone within 30 feet (Reflex save DC 15 half). There is a 30% chance that 2d4 mephits inhabit the geyser (choose steam, ooze, or a mix of both).

Deinonychus: hp 34; *Monster Manual* 60. These deadly predators hunt the valley in packs. The druid Kazgorva sometimes uses them as shock troops and assassins against those he sees as threats to his valley.

Harpy Archer: hp 103; *Monster Manual* 151. These are members of the flocks described in area **C**. They take a few pot shots at intruders and return to their fellows to report.

Ogre Barbarian: hp 79; *Monster Manual* 199. These are members of the tribe at the Rock Tower out hunting. See area **1** for details.

Dire Ape: hp 35; *Monster Manual* 62. These territorial beasts roam the valley and attack anything they see as a threat (including adventurers).

Ooze Mephit: hp 19; *Monster Manual* 183.These inhabit the valley's boiling pools of mud. They are immune to the valley's poisons and react as the steam mephits above. They are different from standard ooze mephits in that their breath weapons do fire damage due to the boiling temperatures of their mud bodies rather than the acid damage typical of their kind.

Tremor: A minor temblor strikes the area. If the PCs are climbing, they must make new Climb checks at a –5 penalty to avoid falling. If they are on the valley floor there is a 10% chance that 1d3 quiescent geysers within 30 feet suddenly burst to life. In addition to the effects and damage described under Geysers above, these also unleash some of the poisonous gas of the valley in the same area of effect. See the Rock Tower for the effects of this gas. The gas itself begins flowing at 10 feet per round downhill immediately after the eruption.

Spinosaurus: hp 210; see area 7. If this creature has already been slain, treat this as no encounter.

A. SANDOR'S LAST STAND (EL 15)

Protruding from the soil and scrub grass on the shores of a small lake are the bony remains of humans and giants intermixed with the broken remains of wagons, bones of draft animals, and the corroded remnants of an assortment of weapons. It seems that a great battle occurred here that had few, if any, survivors. Near the water's edge an overturned wagon with one intact wheel thrusts out of the mud. The ancient remains of a humanoid are still chained to the wheel, as if it was tortured or perhaps left here as a warning.

This is the site where Sandor's second expedition was overrun by giant and ogre attackers in the night. They were slaughtered to a man—all except Sandor, a great warrior in his own right, but no match for the overwhelming giant foes. The giants captured him and chained him to a wagon wheel with a couple of their heavy flails so they could make sport of him. Before they could enjoy themselves, the gas cloud sent by Kazgorva hit the camp and killed them all.

Creature: Sandor remains chained to the wagon wheel, though his spirit does not rest easy, ever longing for the treasures denied him in life and for revenge against the living who might still lay claim to them. His spirit fed from the death and rot around him, and granted him new life as a powerful undead creature called an angel of decay. The animals of the valley have instinctively avoided the undead abomination, but anyone approaching within 40 feet of his resting place or attacking from a distance provokes him to action. As a free action he easily breaks away from the rotten wagon wheel and closes with the party.

SANDOR THE HEADSTRONG **CR 15**

Angel of decay

Libris Mortis 83

CE Large undead

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Spot +29, Listen +29

Aura rotting aura (15 ft. radius; Reflex DC 29, Will DC 29)

Language Abyssal, Common

AC 28, touch 15, flat-footed 26

hp 172 (26 HD) **DR** 10/admantine and magic

Immune undead traits

SR 24

Fort +14 **Ref** +18 **Will** +26

Spd 30 ft. fly 50 ft. (poor)

Melee* 2 claws +20 (2d6+18) and 2 wing slams +15 (1d6+11)

Space 10 ft. **Reach** 10 ft.

Base Atk +13; **Grp** +30

Atk Options Cleave, Power Attack, rotting touch

*includes adjustments for a 5-point Power Attack

Abilities Str 37, Dex 14, Con —, Int 20, Wis 20, Cha 18

SQ unholy grace

Feats Ability Focus (rotting aura), Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Great fortitude, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Toughness

Skills Concentration +29, Diplomacy +6, Hide +18, Knowledge (arcana) +29, Listen +29, Move Silently +26, Search +29, Sense Motive +29, Spellcraft +31, Spot +29, Survival +5

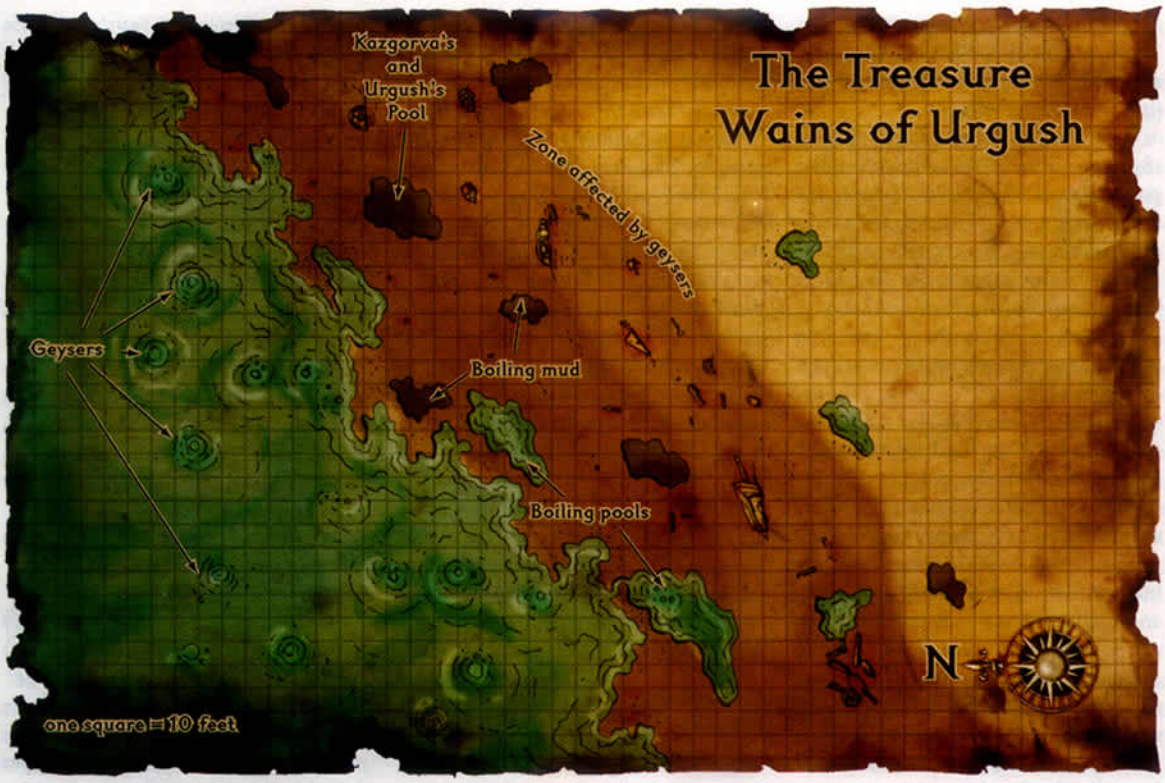
Rotting Aura (Su): When Sandor is not flying, rivulets of vile corruption stream from his body, constantly regenerating and renewing a pool of odiferous rot all around him. This pool covers a 15-foot-radius spread. Any corporeal creature standing on the ground within that area takes 5d6 points of damage (DC 29 Reflex save half) each round as its flesh decays. Additionally, the creature must make a DC 29 Will save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save DCs are Charisma-based. Each round that a creature takes damage from his rotting aura, Sandor heals 5 points of damage per victim.

Rotting Touch (Su): If Sandor hits the same foe with two or more of his natural attacks in a single round, he rots that opponent's flesh. This effect automatically deals an extra 1d6+6 points of damage and heals Sandor of 5 points of damage.

Treasure: At the base of the wagon wheel where Sandor was chained sits the *necklace of adaptation* the giants ripped from his throat prior to torturing him. A DC 23 Search check and an hour's sifting through the soil of the battlefield can locate another 230 gp and 580 sp of Kettite mint, 2 *potions of lesser restoration*, a *wand of fly* (23 charges, CL 6th), and a *potion of water breathing*. These are all that have survived of the items brought by the expedition in hopes of counteracting the valley's deadly gas (the *potion of water breathing* won't help against the gas, but the bearer didn't know that).

B. GEYSERS OF DEATH (EL 3)

At each of these points one or more of the valley's geysers are clearly visible with even a cursory inspection. They erupt every 1d20 minutes unless a tremor occurs, in which case they erupt immediately. See Geysers under the random encounters above for details of their effects and chances for mephit infestation. If a tremor occurs, these geysers produce poisonous gas as described under Tremors and the Rock Tower above.



C. HARPY PATROL (EL 14)

At each of these locations flies a patrol of three harpy archers. These creatures dwell in the surrounding mountains and are relative newcomers to the area. Kazgorva encountered them and enlisted them as aerial watchers for his valley. If they spy intruders, they begin combat with their captivating song from 280 feet in the air. They then descend to 100 feet and make attacks with their composite longbows. They try to avoid getting tangled in a melee if possible. If the party retreats and leaves a captivated character behind, the harpies carry him away to a high mountain ledge to consume at their leisure.

Harpy Archers (3): hp 103 each; *Monster Manual* 150.

D. THE TREASURE WAINS OF URGUSH (EL 15)

A series of geysers blast this small lake with terrific plumes of superheated water every few minutes. The lake itself bubbles and boils with heat. Around the shore of the lake lie several mud pools, some likewise bubbling. Leading up to the shore in a long column are the rotted remains of dozens of overturned wagons and the bones of hundreds of humanoids and animals. Amidst the mud, bones, and wreckage the glint of gold and jewels gleams here and there, still unclaimed after all these years.

These are the remains of the final members of Urgush's horde after their long flight from the Lortmil Mountains. Seeking sanctuary from the Small Folk legions and the harrying armies of ruthless profiteers (such as Sandor of Polvar), they entered this valley, unknowingly marching to their doom. Here on the shores of this lake they prepared to make their stand, but were cut down by a poisonous wind that swept down the valley with hurricane force. Urgush himself swore an oath to Gruumsh as he fell choking into the mud, not far from the spot where Kazgorva died many centuries before. Since then, the gleaming treasures carried by the euroz and jebli have lain untouched by any save curious animals of the valley.

The geysers in this small lake are much larger than those the party may have seen elsewhere in the valley. They always erupt simultaneously every 1d10 rounds, and their area of effect encompasses the lake and everything within 50 feet of the water's edge to a height of 100 feet. The eruptions always last for but a single round. Their effects are otherwise identical to those described under Geysers in the Random Encounters above. Though the lake itself is fairly shallow (averaging about 5 feet deep) and relatively easy to move through. Anyone entering one of the boiling pools of water or mud takes 2d6 points of fire damage per round of exposure.

Creatures: Caked in mud at the edge of the pool lies the mummy lord Kazgorva. He has long since learned of the party's intrusion into his valley through his many animal spies and has waited to confront them here at his place of strength. Though Kazgorva is a mummy lord, he does not resemble

a typical mummy since his preservation occurred as a natural result of his encasement in mud. He resembles a withered and desiccated corpse; his skin permanently stained a tarry black, covered in mud that continually sloughs from him in great gobbets. His face is skeletal, with a few strands of gray hair, a single eye burning with hate, no nose to speak of, and broken, stained teeth visible in a lipless mouth. Because of this moist coating of mud, Kazgorva does not have the typical mummy's vulnerability to fire. He does not have an animal companion, nor does he retain his ability to wild shape.

With Kazgorva is his most powerful servant; the remains of the orc leader Urgush, a terrible vilewight. This hideous creature is also mud-caked, but is still recognizable as having once been a half-orc. He has leathery, desiccated flesh and sharp, needlelike teeth. In addition, his abdomen has been torn open to reveal writhing, leathery intestines, each ending in small, bile-dripping mouth.

KAZGORVA **CR 13**

Male mummified human druid 12
Libris Mortis 111
NE Medium undead (augmented humanoid)
Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Spot +17, Listen +17
Aura despair (DC 19)
Language Common

AC 31, touch 11, flat-footed 30
hp 83 (12 HD); **DR** 5/—
Immune undead traits
Resist fire 30
Fort +11 **Ref** +8 **Will** +15

Spd 40 ft.
Melee slam +20 (2d6+10 plus mummy rot [DC 19])
Base Atk +9; **Grp** +15

Druid Spells Prepared (CL 12th, +10 ranged touch)
6th—*antilife shell**, empowered *flame strike* (DC 20) (2)
5th—*baleful polymorph* (DC 21), *call lightning storm* (DC 21) *insect plague*, *wall of thorns*
4th—*air walk*, *dispel magic* (2), *freedom of movement**
3rd—*greater magic fang* (2)*, *poison* (DC 19), *protection from energy*, *wind wall*
2nd—*barkskin* (2)*, *bull's strength*, *cat's grace*, *resist energy* (2)*
1st—*entangle* (DC 17), *faerie fire* (3), *longstrider**, *produce flame*, *speak with animals*
0—*detect magic* (3), *guidance*, *read magic*, *virtue*
*already cast

Abilities Str 22, Dex 12, Con —, Int 6, Wis 22, Cha 17
SQ spontaneous casting (*summon nature's ally* spells), wild empathy +15
Feats Empower Spell, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (slam), Skill Focus (concentration), Weapon Focus (slam)
Skills Concentration +18, Knowledge (nature) +10, Listen +17, Spellcraft +13, Spot +17, Survival +15
Possessions +3 *leather armor*

Despair (Su) Any creature that views Kazgorya must make a DC 19 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 1d4 rounds. Whether or not the save was successful, that creature cannot be affected by Kazgorya's despair ability for 24 hours.

CV DH

Mummy rot (Su) See the *Monster Manual* page 190 for a description of this ability.

URGUSH **CR 13**

Male vilewright cleric 10 (Gruumsh)
Book of Vile Darkness 183
NE Medium undead
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Spot +12, Listen +14
Languages Abyssal, Common, Giant, Orc

AC 28, touch 13, flat-footed 25; Dodge, Mobility
hp 148 (22 HD)
Immune undead traits
Resist fire 30
Fort +12 **Ref** +11 **Will** +20

Spd 30 ft.

Melee 2 claws +21 (1d6+8 plus energy drain) and
bite +19 (1d8+5 plus energy drain) and
tendril bites +19 (1d6+5 plus energy drain and disease)

Base Atk +13; **Grp** +19

Atk Options Combat Expertise, Spring Attack, feat of strength, improved grab (claws)

Special Atks create spawn, *dark channel* (DC 22), rebuke undead 7/day (+6, 2d6+14 HD, 10th level)

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 10th [CL 11th for evil spells], +17 ranged touch)

5th—*flame strike* (DC 19), *righteous might*[D], *spell resistance*

4th—*dimensional anchor* (2), *divine power*, *freedom of movement**, *unholy blight*[D] (DC 18)

3rd—*dispel magic*, *invisibility purge*, *magic circle against good*[D]*(2), *prayer*

2nd—*bull's strength*, *death knell*, *desecrate*[D]*, *hold person* (DC 16), *silence*, *spiritual weapon*

1st—*bless*, *entropic shield*, *protection from good*[D], *sanctuary* (DC 15), *shield of faith* (2)

0—*detect magic* (3), *guidance*, *read magic*, *virtue*

D domain spell; **Domains** Evil, Strength

*already cast

Abilities Str 22, Dex 16, Con —, Int 16, Wis 18, Cha 18

SQ spontaneous casting (inflict spells)

Feats Ability Focus (*dark channel*), Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Multiattack, Spring Attack

Skills Climb +14, Concentration +25, Hide +16, Knowledge (arcana) +16, Knowledge (religion) +13, Listen +14, Move Silently +26, Spellcraft +18, Spot +12

Possessions *bracers of armor* +4, 4 vials of unholy water and 20 pounds of silver dust (spell components for *desecrate*)

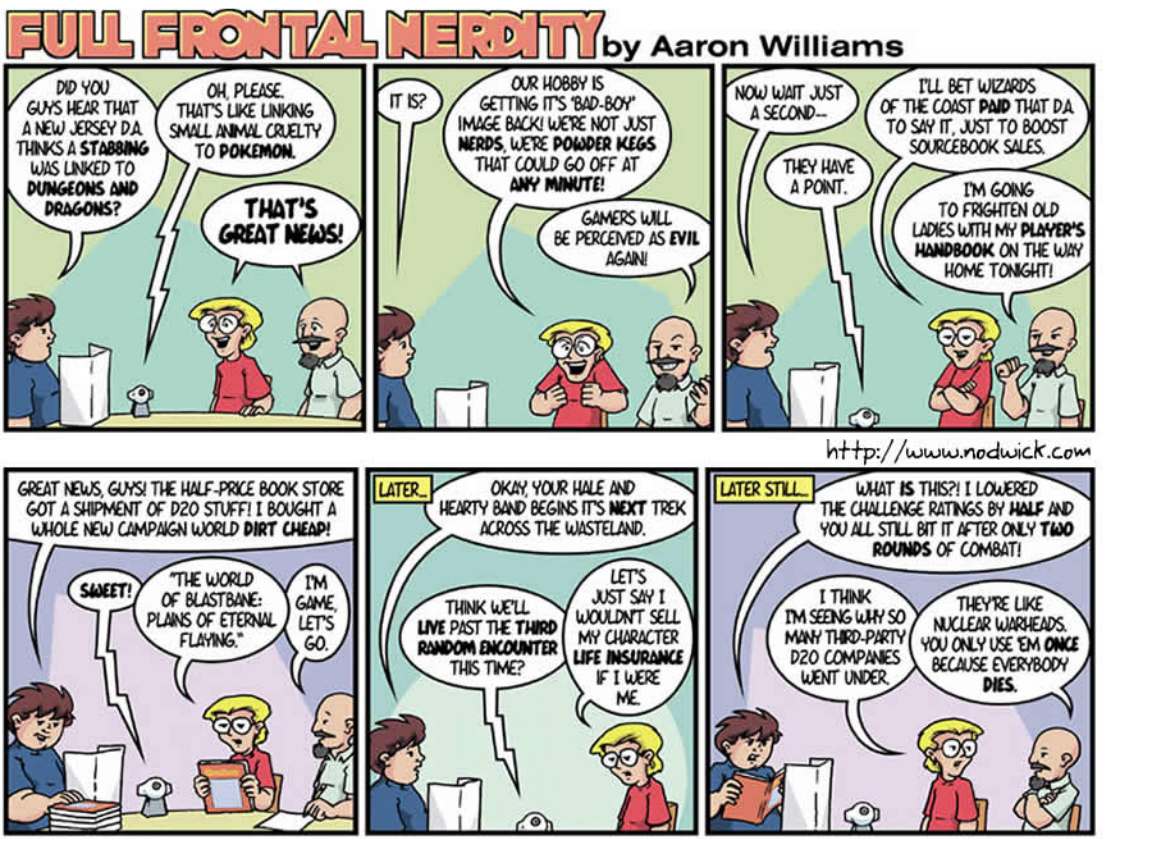
Dark Channel (Sp) Once every other round, Urgosh can channel negative energy into a line of cold, black energy 30 feet long. Everyone in the area takes 8d8 points of damage (Reflex DC 22 half).

Disease (Ex) Any creature hit by the vilewight's intestinal tendrils must make a DC 16 Fortitude save or contract life blindness. The incubation period is 1 day, and the disease causes the victim to be unable to percieve living creatures—such creatrues are treated as invisible, silent, and odorless to the victim.

Energy Drain (Su) Any living creature hit by any of Urgosh's natural attacks gains two negative levels. For each negative level bestowed, Urgosh heals 5 points of damage. If the amount of healing exceeds his maximum hit point total, he gains any excess as temporary hit points. It is a DC 20 Fortitude save to remove these negative levels.

Improved Grab (Ex) If Urgosh hits a Medium or smaller creature with his claw attack, he can attempt to start a grapple as a free action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity. If he successfully grapples a creature, he can automatically hit with his tendril bite attacks on subsequent rounds while the creature remains grappled.

Create Spawn (Su) Any humanoid slain by a vilewight becomes a wight (see *Monster Manual* 255) in 1d4 rounds. Such wights are under the command of the vilewight that created them and remain enslaved


FULL FRONTAL NERDITY by Aaron Williams
DID YOU GUYS HEAR THAT A NEW JERSEY D.A. THINKS A STABBING WAS LINKED TO DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS?
OH, PLEASE. THAT'S LIKE LINKING SMALL ANIMAL CRUELTY TO POKEMON.
THAT'S GREAT NEWS!
IT IS?
OUR HOBBY IS GETTING IT'S 'BAD-BOY' IMAGE BACK! WE'RE NOT JUST NERDS, WE'RE POWDER KEGS THAT COULD GO OFF AT ANY MINUTE!
GAMERS WILL BE PERCEIVED AS EVIL AGAIN!
NOW WAIT JUST A SECOND--
I'LL BET WIZARDS OF THE COAST PAID THAT D.A. TO SAY IT, JUST TO BOOST SOURCEBOOK SALES.
THEY HAVE A POINT.
I'M GOING TO FRIGHTEN OLD LADIES WITH MY PLAYER'S HANDBOOK ON THE WAY HOME TONIGHT!
http://www.nodwick.com
GREAT NEWS, GUYS! THE HALF-PRICE BOOK STORE GOT A SHIPMENT OF D20 STUFF! I BOUGHT A WHOLE NEW CAMPAIGN WORLD DIRT CHEAP!
SWEET!
"THE WORLD OF BLASTBANE: PLAINS OF ETERNAL FLAYING."
I'M GAME, LET'S GO.
LATER...
OKAY, YOUR HALE AND HEARTY BAND BEGINS IT'S NEXT TREK ACROSS THE WASTELAND.
THINK WE'LL LIVE PAST THE THIRD RANDOM ENCOUNTER THIS TIME?
LET'S JUST SAY I WOULDN'T SELL MY CHARACTER LIFE INSURANCE IF I WERE ME.
LATER STILL...
WHAT IS THIS?! I LOWERED THE CHALLENGE RATINGS BY HALF AND YOU ALL STILL BIT IT AFTER ONLY TWO ROUNDS OF COMBAT!
I THINK I'M SEEING WHY SO MANY THIRD-PARTY D20 COMPANIES WENT UNDER.
THEY'RE LIKE NUCLEAR WARHEADS. YOU ONLY USE 'EM ONCE BECAUSE EVERYBODY DIES.

until its destruction. They do not possess any of the abilities they had in life.

Tactics: Kazgorva and Urgush both rest in one of the mud pools that is not boiling, since they do not have any normal resistance to fire damage. While submerged in the mud they are also protected from the scalding fallout from the geysers. They are aware of the party's presence through Kazgorva's many animal spies who bring him reports. When Kazgorva learns that the PCs are drawing near, he casts *antilife shell*, *freedom of movement*, *greater magic fang*, *barkskin*, *resist energy* (fire), and *longstrider* on himself and *greater magic fang*, *barkskin*, and *resist energy* (fire) on Urgush. Meanwhile, Urgush casts *freedom of movement* and *magic circle against good* on himself, *magic circle against good* on Kazgorva, and *desecrate* on the lake. The mummy lord has researched a derivative of *greater magic fang* that functions on undead creatures. All of these spell effects have been incorporated into the above stat blocks. If Kazgorva learns that the PCs favor spells of a particular energy type besides fire, he also casts *protection from energy* (that energy type) on himself. When Kazgorva believes combat is imminent (and if he still has time) he casts *bull's strength* and *cat's grace* on himself, while Urgosh casts *spell resistance*, *entropic shield*, *bless*, and two *shields of faith* (one for each fo them).

Kazgorva opens combat with a *summon nature's ally VI*. If one of the opponents is a cleric, Urgush uses a rebuke attempt to bolster Kazgorva against turning. The two then try to keep the PCs at arms length for as long as possible while they harry them with ranged attack spells and *dark channel*. Urgosh tries to cast both *divine power* and *righteous might* before he enters melee. Both undead try to remain within the area of the *desecrate* for as long as possible.

Treasure: The treasures of the orc wains have been scattered on the ground, picked through by scavengers, and buried by the actions of the geological forces at work in the valley. As a result, some effort is required to recover them. A search of at least two hours uncovers the treasure: 3,900 gp, 325 pp, 15,400 sp, 9,800 cp, a gold ewer shaped like a dragon with ruby eyes worth 3,500 gp, a leather bag with seven emeralds worth 1,000 gp each, a stoppered bronze urn worth 10 gp holding 36 bloodstones worth 50 gp each, a large aquamarine worth 650 gp, a left-handed platinum spiked gauntlet worth 250 gp, a +2 *dwarven urgrosh*, an orc double axe with one adamantine axe head and one +1 *vicious cold iron axe head*, a *staff of evocation* (35 charges), and the *anvil of the Lortmil Mountains* (see sidebar). The dwarven clans of the Lortmils will pay a 20,000 gp reward for the return of the last item.

ANVIL OF THE LORTMIL MOUNTAINS

Created by clerics of Moradin, this lesser artifact serves as a holy relic dedicated to the king of the dwarven gods. It is rumored that it was used to forge many legendary magical weapons of the dwarves. Used by an individual with Craft (weaponsmithing) or Craft (armorsmithing), it allows weapons and armor of extremely fine quality to be made. Masterwork items can be made at half the cost, requiring a Craft DC of 10. If the smith succeeds on a Craft DC of 25 the item has received the special blessing of Moradin and gains a +1 enhancement bonus at no extra cost in materials, XP, or time.

Strong Transmutation; CL 20th; Weight 75 lb

E. THE ERD LAKE

This wide, shallow lake of sterile, crystal-clear water is called death, for here is the source of the great disasters that have befallen the valley so many times. The water is tainted like the lakes in area **1**, and whenever a large tremor disturbs this lake, it releases a massive explosion of deadly gas that pours down the valley in a hurricane-force wind, leveling everything in its path until it reaches the end of the basin and the lakes beneath the rock tower. Denizens of the valley that are able scramble at least 100 feet up the valley slopes can escape certain death. The heavier-than-air gas lingers in the valley for days before finally dissipating enough to allow animal life to return. From this location Kazgorva cast an *earthquake* spell from a scroll years ago in order to eradicate the invasion into his valley. Only a major tremor results in an effect this devastating, but disturbing the bottom of this lake can still release smaller amounts of gas that cover a 500-foot-diameter cloud 40 feet high identical to that described in area **1**. Whenever

THE PORTENT **PETER BERGTING**

-SIGH-... ANOTHER CHRISTMAS WITHOUT GIFTS... I GUESS I'M JUST A BAD PIXIE...
CHEER UP! I'LL GIVE YOU A CHRISTMAS GIFT, I HAVE A TON OF THEM THIS YEAR.
REALLY? WOW YOU'RE MY BEST FRIEND IN THE WHOLE WORLD!
YEAH, TOTALLY! IT ROCKS TO BE ME!
AND THEN HE SAID: "THIS IS FOR LAST CHRISTMAS YOU FAT, MYTHOLOGICAL PARADOX!"
AND THEN HE OPENED FIRE?
WWW.THEPORTENT.COM

this occurs, the lake turns blood red in color for several weeks.

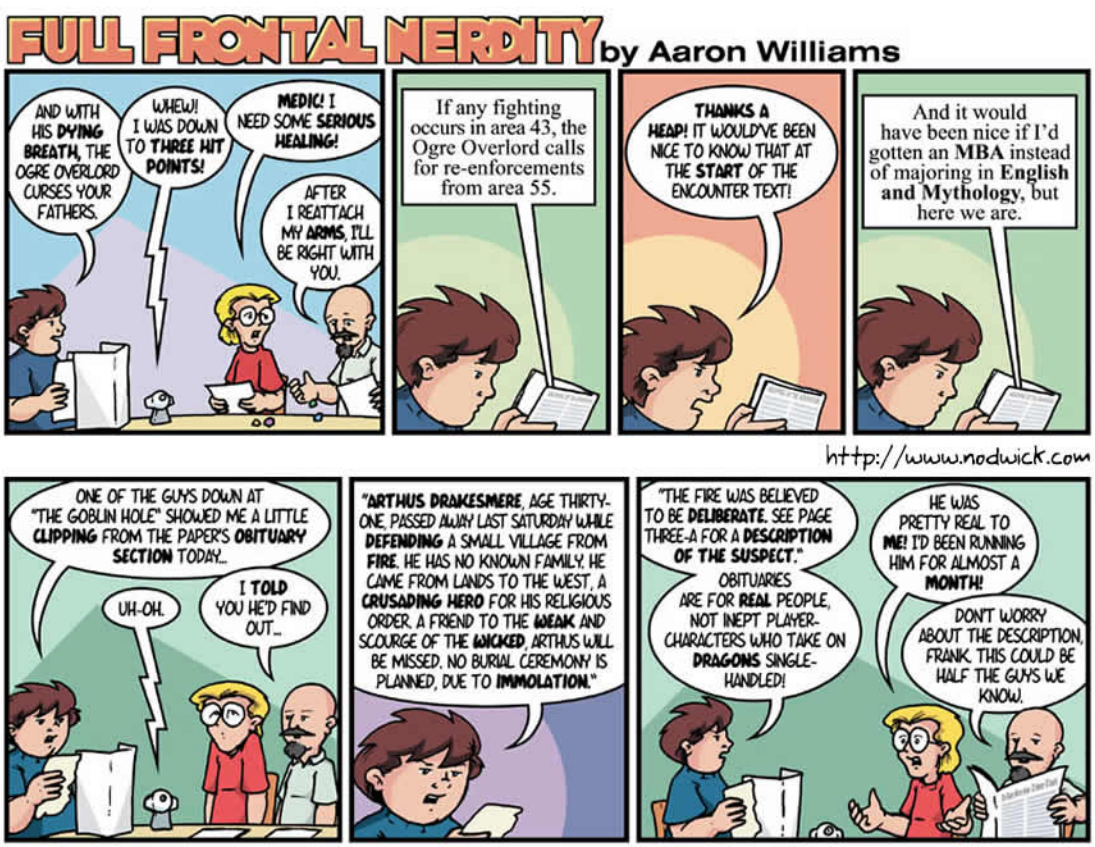
CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Having defeated the guardians of the valley, the party gains a considerable amount of lost treasure. Yet much of the treasure that Sandor so rashly pursued remains hidden within the valley. Some of it was carried away by scavenging animals, while other portions have sunk into the muck of the valley floor. A future adventure could involve the characters conducting a major excavation in the hostile terrain of the valley and the attendant hazards involved in locating these treasures and then removing them under the noses of the governments of Ket and Bissel. If you used an adventure hook involving political intrigue with the Baklunish or the Knights of the Watch, the adventure can be continued as a mission to recover the treasures for their employer or to thwart the efforts of another power group. Finally, a tribe of mercenary harpies inhabits the mountain peaks around the valley that has undoubtedly been paid with large amounts of the lost treasure. A party could choose to search out their nests and eradicate them to recover more of the lost treasures of the Lortmils.

Greg A. Vaughan's previous DUNGEON *credits include: "Tammeraut's Fate" (#106), "Torrents of Dread" (#114), and the Istivin: City of Shadows Campaign Arc (#117, #118, and #119). He is also the author of "Kings of the Rift," part 10 of the Age of Worms Adventure Path, which will appear in issue #133.*

SCALING THE ADVENTURE

"The Hateful Legacy" is designed for four 12th-level characters, but it can be adapted for use by 10th–11th-level characters. Reduce the number of ogre barbarians encountered to no more than three at one time. Spread the rest out between the numbered encounter areas. Reduce the hill giant's barbarian levels by one or two as necessary. Change the spinosaurus to an advanced tyrannosaurus. Reduce the frequency of random encounters in the valley, and allow the party more opportunities to rest and recover. Reduce the number of harpies encountered at any one time to two. Replace the angel of decay with a 21 Hit Die mohrg. Reduce the character levels of Kazgorva and Urgush by one or two as necessary, and don't allow them time to cast all of their preparatory spells.


FULL FRONTAL NERDITY by Aaron Williams
AND WITH HIS DYING BREATH, THE OGRE OVERLORD CURSES YOUR FATHERS.
WHEW! I WAS DOWN TO THREE HIT POINTS!
MEDIC! I NEED SOME SERIOUS HEALING!
AFTER I REATTACH MY ARMS, I'LL BE RIGHT WITH YOU.
If any fighting occurs in area 43, the Ogre Overlord calls for re-enforcements from area 55.
THANKS A HEAP! IT WOULD'VE BEEN NICE TO KNOW THAT AT THE START OF THE ENCOUNTER TEXT!
And it would have been nice if I'd gotten an MBA instead of majoring in English and Mythology, but here we are.
http://www.modwick.com
ONE OF THE GUYS DOWN AT "THE GOBLIN HOLE" SHOWED ME A LITTLE CLIPPING FROM THE PAPER'S OBITUARY SECTION TODAY...
UH-OH.
I TOLD YOU HE'D FIND OUT...
"ARTHUS DRAKESMERE, AGE THIRTY-ONE, PASSED AWAY LAST SATURDAY WHILE DEFENDING A SMALL VILLAGE FROM FIRE. HE HAS NO KNOWN FAMILY. HE CAME FROM LANDS TO THE WEST, A CRUSADING HERO FOR HIS RELIGIOUS ORDER. A FRIEND TO THE WEAK AND SCOURGE OF THE WICKED, ARTHUS WILL BE MISSED. NO BURIAL CEREMONY IS PLANNED, DUE TO IMMOLATION."
"THE FIRE WAS BELIEVED TO BE DELIBERATE. SEE PAGE THREE-A FOR A DESCRIPTION OF THE SUSPECT."
OBITUARIES ARE FOR REAL PEOPLE, NOT INEPT PLAYER-CHARACTERS WHO TAKE ON DRAGONS SINGLE-HANDLED!
HE WAS PRETTY REAL TO ME! I'D BEEN RUNNING HIM FOR ALMOST A MONTH!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE DESCRIPTION, FRANK. THIS COULD BE HALF THE GUYS WE KNOW.

AGE OF WORMS

THE PRINCE OF REDHAND

"I am the soul of this place. When I first stepped upon this land it was nothing but mire and moor and emptiness. It was my work that raised this child, my deeds that caused this town to rise. Her roots are poison by my tendering, and her people blackened by the taint of what lies beneath—a stain I have nurtured. This place is my babe, and my dead blood courses through its veins. It is my gift to Kyuss, that this land should be ruled by a god—and I, Lashonna, shall be his bride."

"The Prince of Redhand" is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure designed for four 15th-level characters. It is also the eighth installment of the Age of Worms Adventure Path, a complete campaign consisting of 12 adventures, several "Backdrop" articles to help Dungeon Masters run the series, and a handful of poster maps of key locations. Your PCs should advance to 16th-level by the conclusion of this adventure. For additional aid in running this campaign, check out *DRAGON*'s monthly "Wormfood" articles, a series that provides additional material to help players survive this campaign. "The Prince of Redhand" is a unique adventure in that it includes relatively few combat encounters. The climax of the adventure involves a banquet wherein the PCs must impress the decadent ruler of a city of bandits with their social skills, not their fighting prowess. Characters who show up at this event dressed in bloody, battered armor will be turned away at the door, so at some point during this adventure, the PCs may need to buy new clothes. Issue #340 of *DRAGON* presents guidelines for what the PCs can do to dress to impress, and perhaps eke out a few precious bonuses on their Diplomacy checks.

Of course, you can also run "The Prince of Redhand" as a stand-alone adventure, or even as part of a campaign of your own design.

BY RICHARD PETT
BY JOACHIM BARRUM, STEVE PRESCOTT, AND EVA WIDERMANN
BY ROBERT LAZZARETTI
AGE OF WORMS CALLIGRAPHY BY DARLENE

ADVENTURE PATH | HIGH-LEVEL (13TH–20TH) | URBAN

PLAYTESTED BY EDWARD ALBERT, GREG VAUGHAN, JOE LESSERT, LISA LESSERT, ERIC ANDERSON, SEAN PAYNE, MIKE FREEMAN, MAC MCANALLY

Adventure Background

In the months leading up to his disappearance, the wizard Balakarde became obsessed with Kyuss and the Age of Worms. As he learned more about the ancient prophecies, he also grew increasingly paranoid, to the extent that he ceased confiding in close friends like the archmage Manzorian. He told no one of his discovery of the sinister connection between the Ebon Triad and the cult of Kyuss, nor did he divulge his theory that the Ebon Triad itself seemed to have been founded in the town of Alhaster. His research led him there, where he attempted to contact a woman named Lashonna, one of Prince Zeech's most trusted advisors and the foremost authority on the town's occult affairs.

Unable to secure an audience with Lashonna when he first arrived, Balakarde began his own investigations into the cult, investigations that led him to believe that a hidden shrine of the Ebon Triad (perhaps the original such shrine) existed somewhere under the town of Alhaster. What he discovered was something far more than a simple shrine—he discovered the Well of Triptych Knowledge, the site where ancient minions of Kyuss known as avolakia first developed the Ebon Triad as a sort of "cover cult" for their own nefarious ends.

Balakarde was unable to fully explore the complex, before he encountered a potent magical creature the avoloakia had nurtured to serve as a "mock aspect" of the Overgod the Ebon Triad so desperately sought to create. As he fled, Balakarde ordered his own guardian to remain behind in the Well's entrance room, in the hope that if the Triad discovered the well, they would be destroyed by what he left behind rather than retain access to such a potent and dangerous ally.

Given a few more months, or even weeks, Balakarde would certainly have discovered the fact that Lashonna herself was much more than a mere advisor to the Prince of Redhand. She is, in fact, a vampiric silver dragon whose allegiance to Kyuss stretches back over 1,500 years. Once allied with a reclusive sect of druids who fought against Kyuss, Lashonna was captured and transformed into a vampiric minion of the Wormgod by Dragotha, the undead dragon who served as Kyuss' voice and proxy. Over the next several centuries, Lashonna succumbed to the Wormgod's evil taint and became Kyuss' most powerful priest. And as her devotion to Kyuss grew, so did her hatred and jealousy of Dragotha. While she did most of the work organizing events for the Age of Worms (including the foundation of the Ebon Triad with the aid of the avolakia of the Wormcrawl Fissure), Dragotha was content to remain in his lair. Now that the Age of Worms is imminent, one of Lashonna's final steps is to remove Dragotha from the equation so that she can take his place at Kyuss' side.

When she returned to Alhaster and learned of Balakarde's discovery of the Well of Triptych Knowledge, she immediately realized he was a perfect patsy for testing Dragotha's strength. She agreed to meet with him and fed him enough knowledge about Dragotha's connection to Kyuss that Balakarde eagerly set off to the Wormcrawl Fissure. His eventual fate is detailed in the Age of Worms adventure "Into the Wormcrawl Fissure." Meanwhile, Lashonna learned much of her enemy by scrying upon Balakarde during his last adventure. She now feels she can defeat Dragotha by sending a properly armed party of adventures into his lair.

In the intervening years, Lashonna used her pawn Zeech to see to the construction of a huge ziggurat. Her use of *dream* spells and her subtle manipulation of their conversations has convinced Zeech that the construction of such a monolith would guarantee him a righteous place at Hextor's side, when in fact it simply serves as a foundation for the manifestation of a new Spire of Long Shadows, the last component necessary to bring Kyuss back into the world and begin the Age of Worms.

Adventure Synopsis

The characters return to the Fortress of Unknown Depths to report their findings in Kuluth-Mar to Manzorian. Afterward, the archmage reveals that he and his allies have discovered where Balakarde went after his time in the jungle. He traveled to the town of Alhaster to seek the advice of a woman named Lashonna. As far as Manzorian can tell, she was the last person to see Balakarde alive. It's probable that Lashonna remembers meeting Balakarde a decade ago, and might know more about his fate (or at the very least, the fate of his notes on Kyuss and the Age of Worms).

The PCs have several days to explore Alhaster and get to know its denizens and dangers. They find Lashonna is unavailable, but also quickly learn that in a few days, Prince Zeech intends to throw an invitation-only party at his palace to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of his rule over Alhaster. From what the PCs learn, Lashonna will certainly be at this event, and it appears to be the only point at which anyone outside of her immediate circle of allies could conceivably get a chance to speak to her. Securing invitations to the festival ends up being one of several things the PCs can do in the first half of this adventure. They can also investigate the presence of the Ebon Triad in Alhaster, discover the lair of the black dragon responsible for attacking Diamond Lake, and may even uncover the secrets hidden in the Well of Triptych Knowledge.

The last part of this adventure details Zeech's gala and banquet, in which the PCs meet the movers and shakers of this province of the Bandit Kingdoms and finally get a chance to approach the mysterious Lashonna.

"The Prince of Redhand" is an unusual adventure in that the PCs aren't expected to defeat the enemy. Rather, the thrust of this adventure is to introduce the players to the city of Alhaster, as it plays an important role in the campaign's climax. If the PCs are ultimately successful in preventing the Age of Worms, they could even end the campaign as the inheritors of Prince Zeech's crown, becoming the rightful rulers of Alhaster and the entire province of Redhand. "The Prince of Redhand" is thus a tour of the PCs' future home, before they even know they're in the housing market. Throughout this adventure, choices the PCs make and alliances they forge gain them Authority

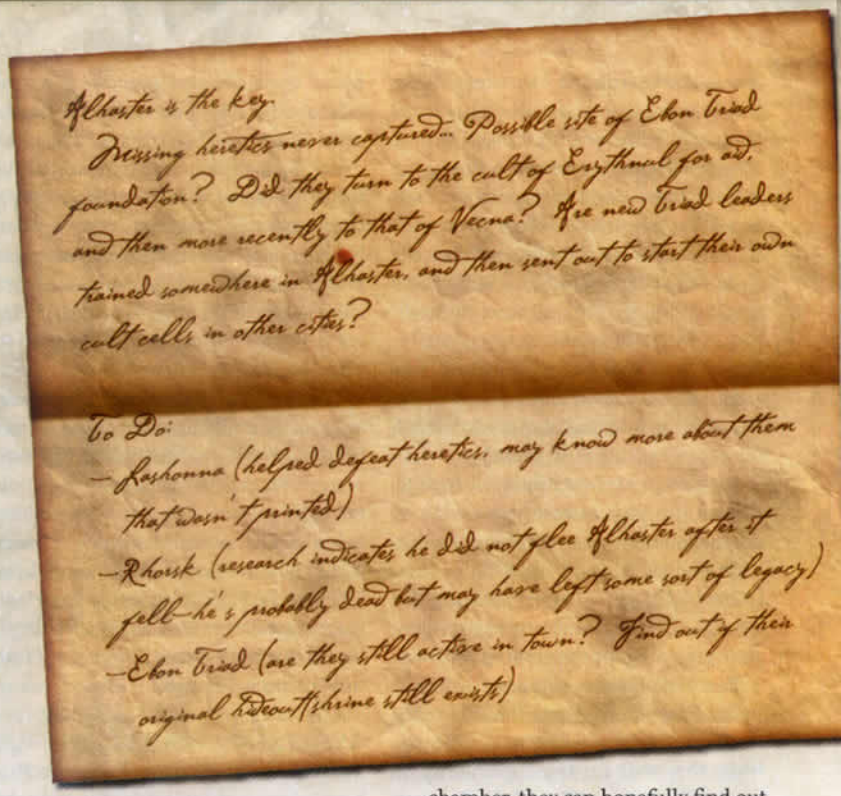
Points. Keep track of these points, since the number of points they accrue now can have a significant impact on their chances for success in the final adventure, "Dawn of a New Age."

Adventure Hooks

The primary goal for the PCs in "The Prince of Redhand" should be tracking down what happened to Balakarde. While they were exploring the ruins of Kuluth-Mar in "The Spire of Long Shadows," Manzorian and his allies Agath, Celeste, and Eligos spent their time researching the Ebon Triad, Kyuss, and the cause of Balakarde's disappearance. After the PCs report upon their experiences in Kuluth-Mar, Manzorian reveals to them the results of their research.

Although they've learned little about Kyuss himself (certainly nothing that the PCs didn't learn in greater detail from their explorations of Kuluth-Mar), they did manage to unearth some information about the Ebon Triad. In several of the scrolls and books in Manzorian's vast library, they found references to Ebon Triad activity, most of which had short notes written by Balakarde in the margins—notes that repeated over and over his suspicion that the Ebon Triad was little more than a front for the cult of Kyuss. Even more curious, in every book and scroll that mentions Ebon Triad activity, Balakarde has underlined the word "Alhaster." It would seem, from reading these notes, that a surprising number of Ebon Triad leaders hailed from this town in the Bandit Kingdom nation of Redhand.

On a hunch, Celeste searched Manzorian's library for books about the city of Alhaster and found only one—*A History of Alhaster*. An outdated book about the city's history, it was written by a cleric of St. Cuthbert named Rhorsk only a few months before a despotic ruler named Prince Zeech seceeded from the Shield Lands. One section of *A History of Alhaster* recounts the emergence and influence of a cabal of Hextorian heretics who attempted to establish an underground cult somewhere in the city, a cult dedicated to the ascension of their god into something greater.


Alhaster is the key.
Missing heretics never captured. Possible site of Ebon Triad foundation? Did they turn to the cult of Erythnul for aid, and then more recently to that of Vecna? Are new Triad leaders trained somewhere in Alhaster, and then sent out to start their own cult cells in other cities?
To Do:
– Lashonna (helped defeat heretics, may know more about them that wasn't printed)
– Rhorsk (research indicates he did not flee Alhaster after it fell—he's probably dead but may have left some sort of legacy)
– Ebon Triad (are they still active in town? Find out if their original Hextor shrine still exists)

This cult made particular use of what they called "the Writhing Dead." The cult was defeated with the aid of one of Alhaster's greatest spellcasters, an elven noble named Lashonna, but its leaders escaped persecution. In the margins of this account, Balakarde made a fairly extensive note, a copy of which Manzorian hands to the PCs to study. The best route, Manzorian suggests, is to check up on the leads Balakarde indicates in his notes.

If you aren't running "The Prince of Redhand" as part of the Age of Worms, the goal of this adventure can change dramatically. Used in conjunction with this issue's Backdrop on the city of Alhaster, you can set the PCs' goals in town to be any number of things. Some possible examples include:

- The PCs have heard rumors that potent and unique elixirs can be found somewhere in Alhaster, and come seeking them for themselves or for a patron.
- The PCs may discover that one of the evil organizations they've fought against for the entire campaign was founded in a secret chamber below the town of Alhaster. If they can locate this chamber, they can hopefully find out how to defeat this group.
- After making a name for themselves elsewhere, the PCs find themselves invited, out of the blue, to Prince Zeech's celebration. Zeech has heard of their exploits, and wants them to attend simply to show off to his allies how well-connected he is. When the PCs arrive in Alhaster, they'll discover that until the festival, they won't be able to speak to Zeech, and will have to spend a week trying to stay out of trouble.

PART ONE: ALHASTER—CITY OF SCOUNDRELS

The town of Alhaster is presented in detail on the fold-out map that accompanies this issue, and in the Backdrop article that begins on page 78. The method by which the PCs arrive in Alhaster is unimportant—if they ask Manzorian for aid, he'll be able to lead them to a painting in his study that depicts the Alhaster skyline as viewed from the road known as the Toilway that runs to the east from the main gates. Characters who concentrate on this painting treat the gates of Alhaster as studied carefully for the pur-

poses of teleportation (Alhaster is only a little more than 300 miles away from Manzorian's Fortress, so it's well within range of *teleport*), and can use this route to travel to the city. Other methods, such as sailing over the Lake of Unknown Depths or taking the long way around on horseback are possible as well; whatever method the PCs choose, the only time constraint is the date on which Zeech's gala is to occur—which, if you can arrange it, should be a week after the PCs arrive in town (no matter what day of the year they happen to arrive).

As the PCs explore Alhaster, strive to present the city's atmoshpere as one of desperate festivity—everywhere the PCs turn in Low Alhaster, they'll be confronted by hanging banners bearing the symbol of Hextor and laborers desperately preparing for the coming festivals.

This part of the adventure is organized into a selection of events the PCs experience during their first week in town while they wait for the opportunity to speak to Lashonna at Zeech's Anniversary Celebration. Feel free to omit or add any encounters as befits your style of play, but remember that the primary goal of "The Prince of Redhand" isn't to defeat a monster or recover a magic item—it is to introduce the PCs to a new base of operations that may end up being their new home.

Finally, if the characters attempt to track down Balakarde, they'll find his trail has grown cold in the years since he visited Alhaster. Gather Information checks are met with blank stares, but the use of magic like *commune* or *divination* can gain some information. If the PCs try to track Balakarde with magic, you can use the following details concerning his visit to Alhaster to respond to their spells.

When Balakarde arrived in Alhaster, he asked for an appointment with Lashonna and ended up having to wait a week. He spent this time investigating the presence of the Ebon Triad in town, and also managed to track down the remains of the St. Cuthbert priest Rhorsk, the author of the book on Alhaster's history. His investigations led him to the Well of Tryptych Knowledge, and there he found proof that the cult of Kyuss invented the Ebon Triad. He also found a powerful creature the cult of Kyuss had created to serve as an oracle of sorts for the Ebon Triad, and after he was forced to flee from this creature he left one of his own creations in the complex to prevent other Ebon Triad members from exploiting it. He then had his meeting with Lashonna, and she sent him onward to the Wormcrawl Fissure to seek more information about Kyuss.

Discern location fails to locate Balakarde, as he is currently dead and his soul has been shattered into three bickering ghosts, none of which retain enough of the whole to qualify as Balakarde anymore—as long as his soul persists in this state, even *wish* and *miracle* are powerless to locate him. The best the PCs can do at this point is to piece together his trail. Eventually, they'll have a chance to rescue him during "Into the Wormcrawl Fissure."

Authority Points

As this adventure progresses, the PCs have numerous opportunities to make an impression on the citizens of Alhaster. News spreads quickly, and the arrival of characters as powerful as the PCs makes the town sit up and take notice. The characters' reputation in Alhaster can be measured by the amount of Authority Points they've accrued.

In the following events and encounters, you'll be told when to award (or remove) Authority Points to the group As they gain Authority Points, the party becomes more well-known. Generally, you should award everyone in the group the same amount of Authority Points, but in some cases, certain characters may accrue more as a result of their specific actions. There is no maximum to the number of authority points a character can accrue. At any one time, a character has an Authority score equal to the amount of points he has accrued plus his Charisma modifier.

Later in this campaign, characters will need to make Authority Checks. This is a d20 roll modified by the character's Authority score. These checks feature prominently in "Dawn of a New Age," where they are used to determine the outcome of several situations where the PCs are forced to take command during the doom that comes to Alhaster.

Rumors in Alhaster

Characters who listen to idle chatter in taverns, ask local merchants about current events, or otherwise ask around town are certain to learn something interesting, even if what they learn isn't always true. Use the following table to randomly determine a rumor that the PCs might overhear.

Alhaster Rumors

d8 Roll	Rumor
1	"Prince Zeech didn't invite the high-priest of Hextor to his banquet because he's looking to replace the old man! Wonder who Prince Zeech has in mind to take his place? Certainly it's someone he DID invite to the banquet!" *(False; Zeech didn't invite the high-priest simply because he thinks of himself as the high-priest—the cleric who holds that title in the church is nothing more than his mouthpiece.)*
2	"A couple of my stupid friends heard that the dragon what lives under the Traitors' Graves got killed. They went out there to loot her lair, and I haven't heard from them since. Did I mention they were stupid?" *(True; this dragon was actually Ilthane, but her lair is far from undefended.)*
3	"There's something strange about the Church of Blessed Deliverance. My cousin heard someone crying in the chapel one day, but wasn't brave enough to look inside. I think the place is haunted." *(True; an undead cleric, once a priest of the church, lurks in its partially collapsed cellar.)*
4	"Lady Lashonna's lived in Alhaster for decades, since before our beloved prince gained control. She's the only one he seems to defer to. Some people think they're lovers. Personally, I think the prince is a wonderful man who is simply being polite to one of his most famous subjects." *(True, although as much as Zeech might want it otherwise, he and Lashonna are not lovers.)*
5	"A patrol of Blessed Angels seized

a cratefull of the latest copy of the *Sinchaser Report* and took the bookseller who had stored the crate in his shop into their Aerie a week ago. No one's heard from him since. Good riddance, I say!" *(False, although the Blessed Angles often spread rumors like this to keep the unknown writers of this antiestablishment newsletter on their toes.)*

6 "Something needs to be done about that high priest of Kord. He's always leering at people and spreading dissent. I heard he's planning to organize a riot using magic, and plans on using it to disrupt things during Prince Zeech's banquet!" *(False.)*

7 "The Ebon Triad might not be as active in town as it once was. That's certainly due to Prince Zeech's skill at rooting out those heretics. I heard tell they had a dragon working for them at one point, but that it was slain by a group of heroes recently on the far side of the Nyr Dyv." *(True; this dragon was Ilthane.)*

8 "I'm not sure that allowing the Scarlet Spire such autonomy in the disposal of the dead is a great idea. I heard they're building an army of undead in chambers below the boneyard and plan to use these monsters to stage a coup. I'm sure Prince Zeech knows what he's doing in letting them handle the disposal of the dead, but still..." *(False.)*

Event 1: Arrival in Alhaster

However the PCs arrive at Alhaster, they find the city bustling with activity. The locals have been anticipating the festivities of Zeech's Anniversary for months—even those who aren't invited to the gala itself are looking forward to the numerous other events (parades, sales, street performances, and so on) Zeech promised the populace. A feeling of mirth and excitement fills the air, but the longer the PCs stay in town, the more they should come to realize that much of this joy is feigned. The promised parades end up being little more than shameless propaganda marches for Zeech or displays of wealth by the nobles. Sales end up being minor discounts for specially imported goods of questionable quality, and even with these discounts, most people can't afford to spend much. Street performances tend to be tired affairs and pale imitations of events the PCs may have already seen in the Free City. And over it all hangs the feeling that it's only Alhaster's richest inhabitants who are actually having fun—for everyone else, the festivities only mean more work and toil. Yet to complain is to invite a visit by the brutish Watchers or the sinister Blessed Angels, so the populace rarely complains.

Visitors to Alhaster are expected to enter the city via the docks or one of the three gates along the eastern wall. As they do, a passively disinterested hobgoblin guard (a member of the Watchers) gives the group a cursory glance to check for anything that might mark a visitor as a rabble-rouser (open display of good-aligned faith, dangerous-looking animals, and large numbers of armed soldiers are three great ways to get unwanted attention at this stage). They ask the nature of the visitor's business in town, but for the most part no one really cares why someone's come to visit Alhaster. In a place where pirates, bandits, smugglers, and worse walk the open streets without fear, the guards really have little interest in stopping people at gates to harass them. Zeech prides himself on not charging docking or gate taxes to visitors, since he has little need to raise money when all he needs to do is seize the property of one of his citizens when he needs a little extra cash.

When the PCs enter town, the character with the highest Diplomacy skill should make a DC 15 Diplomacy check—everyone else in the group can aid this character's roll with DC 10 Diplomacy checks of their own. The primary DC increases by +5 for every character who might strike the guard as a "rabble-rouser" (such as a paladin or good cleric openly displaying their faith, a druid or ranger who wants to bring a large animal into town, or a quiet cloaked spellcaster who carries a staff made of bones and skulls). If the Diplomacy check is failed, the guard demands a tax in the amount of 100 gp. Failure to pay this tax results in the guard denying the group entrance to the city. If the PCs pick a fight or try to enter the city anyway, the Watcher (a 6th-level hobgoblin fighter) tries to stop them (unless successfully Intimidated). The PCs have little to fear from a single Watcher, or even a patrol of a half-dozen, but if they continue to make spectacles of themselves, they'll be confronted by a group of four Blessed Angels who attempt to capture or kill the troublemakers. In the end, characters who are more interested in fighting their way through Alhaster aren't going to make it far, so for the remainder of this adventure it is assumed that they at least try to avoid causing too many confrontations.

Alhaster is openly tolerant of any character race, but certain classes may find it more difficult to get things done in this town. Needs and concerns regarding the specific classes are touched on below.

Barbarian, Fighter: No one bats an eye at anyone who appears to be a barbarian or fighter—in fact, Alhaster's social climate of "might makes right" means that those who wear lots of armor or carry lots of weapons find it easier to get what they want. These characters gain a +2 bonus on all Diplomacy, Gather Information, and Intimidate checks made in town against the lower class and the city guard (both Watchers and Blessed Angels). A character who is not a barbarian or fighter can disguise himself as one (and get this bonus) with a DC 20 Disguise check.

Bard, Rogue: Bards and rogues should feel most at home in Alhaster of all the character classes, for this town is truly one where their skills can shine. Most of the merchants and nobles in town feel a particular kinship to characters who appear to be entertainers, swashbucklers, or criminals. These characters gain a +2 bonus on all Diplomacy, Gather Information, and Intimidate checks made in town against business owners, nobles, and criminals. A character who is not a bard or rogue can disguise himself as one (and get this bonus) with a DC 25 Disguise check

Cleric, Paladin: Clerics of Hextor, Wee Jas, and Kord don't raise eyebrows if they

display their faith openly, as these deities have functioning churches in town. Hextorian clerics gain a +2 bonus on Diplomacy, Gather Information, and Intimidate checks made against the lower class, while those of Wee Jas gain the same against the nobility. Clerics of Kord gain no particular bonuses, and are often greeted with smirks and cruel jokes since the church of Kord in town is hardly awe-inspiring. Clerics of most other deities typically pass unmolested. Any cleric of a good deity who publicly proclaims his affiliation finds himself shunned by almost every facet of the town—the guards are more suspicious, the locals are afraid to be seen speaking to them, and the nobles find them quaint but foolish. Such clerics suffer a –4 penalty on all Charisma skill checks made against citizens of Alhaster. Clerics of Hieroneous and paladins are particularly vilified in this town, and they suffer a –8 penalty on these checks instead. Zeech has decreed that all religions (even that of Hieroneous) are welcome in his city, but the city's reaction to good clerics doesn't bear out this proclamation.

Druid, Ranger: Druids and rangers (and any class that seems to be more at peace in the natural world, or is followed everywhere by a loyal animal companion) have a stigma of being "country folk." Alhaster is very much an urban environment, and locals typically treat these classes with a mixture of amusement and curiosity.

Monk: Monks are rare in Alhaster, and those who are here are universally regarded to be agents for the notorious Scarlet Brotherhood far to the south. These rumors are enough, however, that obvious monks can enjoy the same benefit as a barbarian or fighter (see above).

Sorcerer, Wizard: Arcane spellcasters are fairly uncommon in Alhaster, yet they are not particularly hated. Neither are they particularly loved. Characters who are obviously arcanists receive no particular benefit or hindrance in town.

Event 2: Seeking Lashonna

One of the first things the PCs should attend to in Alhaster is to attempt to make contact with Lashonna. Finding her home is easy. A DC 10 Gather Information check is all that's required to learn that her estate is known as Mistwall Manor (area **28**). Getting an appointment to visit her is another matter.

The approach to Mistwall Manor is protected by a 12-foot-high stone wall. The entrance to the estate grounds is a small gatehouse attended at all times by a well-dressed guard (LE human male rogue 4) who politely informs any would-be visitors that Lashonna is currently indisposed, and will be so for some time. If the PCs wish to schedule an appointment to meet with the lady, the guard cheerfully informs them that the soonest Lashonna can meet with visitors is in two months. With a DC 15 Diplomacy check, the guard suggests that if the PCs really need to talk to her that badly, they should see if they can secure invitations to Zeech's Anniversary Banquet—Lashonna is scheduled to be in attendance there.

Event 3: Invitation Only

It shouldn't take long for the characters to realize that a big event is coming to Alhaster. Banners bearing the coat of arms of Alhaster (a variant of the symbol of Hextor) fly from countless rooftops. The streets are filled with street performers and merchants offering 10% discounts on their wares. A DC 10 Gather Information check is all that's required to learn what's coming—Prince Zeech has announced a city-wide celebration to commemorate the 20th year of his rule. While dozens of parades, performances, and other events are scheduled to take place, the most impressive will doubtless be the Grand Banquet, an invitation-only gala hosted at the prince's palace. Everyone who's anyone in Alhaster will be at this prestigious event—if the PCs ask specifically about Lashonna, the universal opinion is that she'll be there, since she's Zeech's most trusted advisor. Some people even whisper that the two are lovers.

Securing invitations to the Grand Banquet is easier said than done. Zeech made sure that only a very select group of people would be in attendance, and there simply aren't a lot of invitations floating around. A DC 15 Gather Information check is enough to determine that a certain number of nobles (mostly those from other provinces in the Bandit Kingdoms) who were invited will not be attending, and that rather than risk having empty seats at his banquet table (scandal!), Zeech has given these rejected invitations to Armhin Loratio, the owner of the Deluxury (area **21**), trusting him to find suitable folk to fill the available slots. Many have approached Armhin for a chance at the invitations, but so far, he has rejected all hopefuls.

There are enough invitations available at the Deluxury to cover all of the PCs, but they'll need to do more than simply show up in order to secure them. Zeech has asked Armhin to look for "heroic types," since he thinks that the presence of heroes at his table can only enhance his popularity. Armhin demands to personally meet everyone in the group who wants an invitation, and asks each PC a series of related questions about their names, their accomplishments, and their future goals. Have each player make a Diplomacy check while talking to Armhin (or a Bluff check if they're trying to trick him with false tales). Note the results of these checks in secret, but no matter what the PCs roll, they'll all be given invitations. After the invitations are given, Armhin takes the character who had the highest Diplomacy or Bluff check aside and confides in him that he's the only one Armhin really thinks will fit in, and that the behavior of the other characters is on this PC's shoulders. If the others cause any problems, this character will be the one to pay the price.

For the most part, these skill checks and threats are little more than smoke and mirrors to impress upon the PCs the importance of the event. Once the PCs secure their invitations, they can learn a little more about what's expected of them at the party with Gather Information checks. A DC 20 check is enough for them to learn that they are expected to dress well for the occasion, and that weapons are certainly not allowed (although armor, if well cleaned, is). A DC 30 check is enough to learn that Zeech often expects gifts at his parties, as a way for those lucky few who are invited

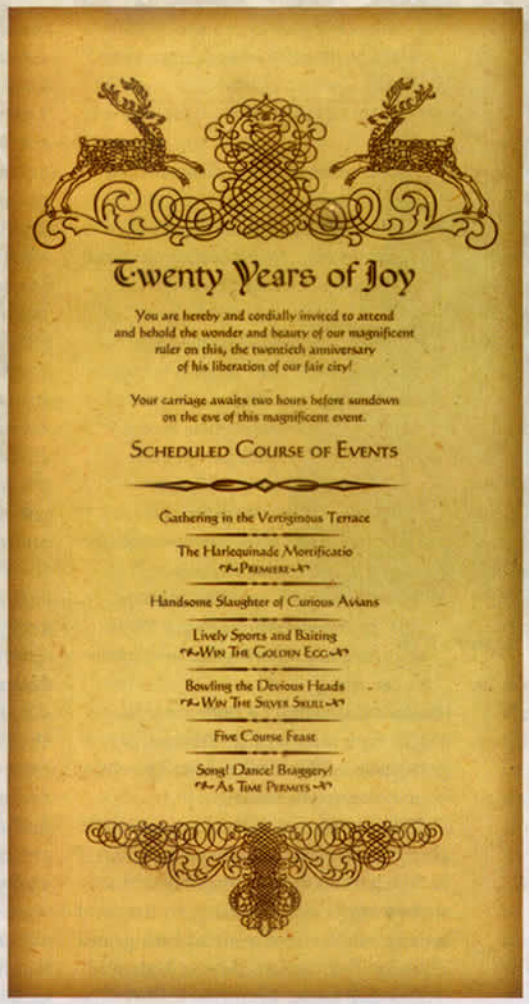
to thank him for his generosity. These gifts should be significant, worth at least 2,000 gp apiece.

Authority Point Reward: Grant each character an authority point when they receive their invitations to Zeech's party.

Event 4: The Hungry Priest (EL 10)

Another lead the PCs received is the name Rhorsk, the author of *A History of Alhaster*. Characters who ask about him in town learn nothing of use as no one knows him. If the PCs reveal he was a cleric of St. Cuthbert, their questions are instead met with derision and mockery, and they are told, "None of them type still live here, despite the fact that Zeech decreed their church should be left untouched. The place is falling into ruin, a daily reminder that Cuthbert has no place in Alhaster. You know, some folk say the place is haunted!"

The one-time church of St. Cuthbert is known as the Church of Blessed Deliverance (area **23**), and it does indeed still stand, if only barely. The building was partially burned 20 years ago, and now its sagging, blackened walls bear numerous signs that read, "Condemned by the Order and Ineffable Wisdom of Almighty Prince Zeech—Entry Prohibited!"


Twenty Years of Joy
You are hereby and cordially invited to attend and behold the wonder and beauty of our magnificent ruler on this, the twentieth anniversary of his liberation of our fair city!
Your carriage awaits two hours before sundown on the eve of this magnificent event.
Scheduled Course of Events
Gathering in the Vertiginous Terrace
The Harlequinade Mortificatio
~A Premiere ~
Handsome Slaughter of Curious Avians
Lively Sports and Baiting
~ Win The Golden Egg ~
Bowling the Devious Heads
~ Win The Silver Skull ~
Five Course Feast
Song! Dance! Braggery!
~ As Time Permits ~

Entry into the ruins is indeed prohibited, and if the PCs take no precautions to hide or disguise their exploration of the ruin, they are confronted 1d4+4 rounds later by a Blessed Angel who teleports into the area to demand they leave this "monument to past failures." The erinyes does not expect resistance (unless the PCs are already known to be trouble-makers); if attacked, she teleports back to the Angel's Aerie, gathers three other Blessed Angels, and then they all teleport back here in 1d4 rounds to attempt to arrest the PCs.

If the PCs enter the church with stealth (requiring only a passably good plan and a DC 10 Hide check if the church is approached from an alleyway), they'll be able to explore the interior at their leisure. Little of interest remains, but a DC 15 Search check reveals a partially hidden doorway that was once buried under rubble. A character with Track can determine with a DC 30 Survival check that the rubble was cleared several years ago, about the time that Balakarde would have been in town. The door is of heavy stone but is not locked.

Beyond is a short but very steep circular stairway leading down to a small crypt below the church. In places the ceiling sags ominously. Despite the appearance, the crypt is fairly sound, structurally speaking. Bones are scattered in tangled heaps all over the floor, and the twelve tombs that surround the central chamber have been violated. The brick-lined crypt walls have been torn down and narrow, claustrophobic tunnels have been dug through the stony earth. A DC 23 Spellcraft check reveals these tunnels were created by repeated applications of *stone shape*. The tunnels create a meandering network of cramped crawlways that eventually open into the equally cramped sewers and tangled smuggler's tunnels beneath Alhaster.

Creature: The crypt has served as the home of a pitiful creature named Rhorsk for the last twenty years. Once a cleric of St. Cuthbert, he became trapped in this basement after bandits set fire to the church above and barricaded the door leading down here. He survived longer than he should have only because he resorted to eating some of the "fresher" bodies that were interred down here with him. Eventually starvation claimed his maddened soul. He rose the next night as an undead monster. Such was the extent of his madness and his sins against his ancestors that he became a gravetouched ghoul, a more powerful type of ghoul that retains fragments of its abilities and personality from life.

Rhorsk created the tunnels that lead to the sewers, and uses them to scavenge for food. He avoids the Alhaster Boneyard due to a reasonable fear of the Wee Jas clerics who patrol the place, instead claiming the rotting dead of the Alhaster Harbor as his banquet. His late-night scrabblings and howls of despair have given rise to the rumors that the church is haunted.

When the PCs arrive, Rhorsk is softly moaning to himself—if he hears anyone entering his crypt he clambers up the largest mound of bones and immediately begins shrieking in gibberish at anyone who enters his home. Rhorsk is a cowardly creature, and does not initiate attacks unless intruders approach within 10 feet or he is himself attacked. He appears as a twisted, feral, gray-skinned

man with large jagged fingernails, sharp teeth, red eyes, and festering skin. His body seems frail and emaciated save for his belly, which is disturbingly round and full. He wears the tattered remnants of once fine robes of St. Cuthbert over his magic chain shirt, the only possessions he still retains from life.

Rhorsk is unaware of the passing of time after his death, in his madness he believes he is still flesh and blood and that his chosen meals are not the bodies of the dead but in fact gifts from St. Cuthbert to keep him alive until he can rebuild the church above. Proof to the contrary fills him with terror and forces him to attack. Rhorsk still receives clerical spells, but despite his belief that he serves St. Cuthbert, his spells in fact come from a different source entirely—they are granted by an obscure ghoul deity who took a mocking interest in Rhorsk's fall from grace.

RHORSK **CR 10**

Male human gravetouched ghoul cleric 9
CE Medium undead
Libris Mortis 104
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft; Listen –1, Spot –1
Languages Common, Celestial

AC 21, touch 13, flat-footed 18
hp 58 (9 HD)
Immune undead traits
Fort +6, **Ref** +6, **Will** +3

Spd 30 ft.
Melee bite +7 melee (1d6+1 plus ghoul fever and paralysis) and
2 claws +5 melee (1d4 plus paralysis)
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +7
Special Atk rebuke undead 6/day (+16, 2d6+14)
Spells Prepared (CL 9th; CL 10th for chaos and evil spells; +9 ranged touch):
5th—*dispel law*[DC], *spell resistance*, *wall of stone*
4th—*air walk*, *control water*, *chaos hammer*[DC] (DC 19), *tongues*
3rd—*dispel magic*, *magic circle against law*[D], *stone shape* (3)
2nd—*aid*, *bull's strength*, *cat's grace*, *hold person* (DC 17), *shatter*[D] (DC 17), *silence* (DC 17)
1st—*bless*, *command* (DC 16), *entropic shield*, *obscuring mist*, *protection from law*[DC], *sanctuary* (DC 16), *shield of faith*
0—*detect magic* (2), *guidance* (2), *read magic* (2)
D Domain Spell; **Domains** Chaos, Evil; C chaos spell

Abilities Str 12, Dex 16, Con —, Int 15, Wis 4, Cha 21
SQ spontaneous casting (inflict spells), +2 turn resistance
Feats Alertness, Combat Casting, Craft Wondrous Item, Multiattack, Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus (Knowledge [history])
Skills Concentration +12, Heal +9, Knowledge (history) +17, Knowldge (religion) +14, Listen –1, Spot –1
Possessions *+2 chain shirt*

Ghoul Fever (Su) Disease—bite; Fortitude save DC 19, incubation period 1 day, damage 1d3 Con and 1d3 Dex. A humanoid who dies from this disease becomes a ghoul at the next midnight (or a ghast if 4 HD or higher).
Madness (Ex) Rhorsk uses his Charisma score to determine his spell save DCs, bonus spells, and his highest-level spells he can cast.
Paralysis (Ex) Victims hit by Rhorsk's bite or claw must make a DC 19 Fortitude save or be paralyzed for 1d4+1 rounds. Elves have immunity to this paralysis.

Tactics: Rhorsk should pose little threat to the PCs; he does what he can if escape isn't an option, opening with one or two spells but resorting to his feral nature after a few rounds, biting and clawing at victims until he is destroyed.

Development: Rhorsk's initial attitude is hostile—in order to make him talk, the PCs will need to make him at least friendly with a DC 40 Diplomacy check. He won't talk if turned or rebuked, but if commanded by a cleric that channels negative energy he'll become helpful. Likewise, spells like *control undead* and *command undead* can secure his cooperation. Killing Rhorsk and then *resurrecting* him cures his madness and also makes him helpful.

If asked about the book he wrote in life, Rhorsk grows thoughtful and wistful. If asked about his account of the cult of Hextor heretics, he actually grows a bit agitated, and admits that there's a little more to that story than he recorded. In truth, all of the heretics were captured and executed, but in interrogating their bodies afterward via *speak with dead*, he discovered that they had actually been set on their path by a mysterious contact known to them only as Mother Maggot. This mysterious figure gave the cultists the worm-eaten undead they used to cause so much trouble, and apparently promised more support if they were successful in their crusade against Alhaster. Rhorsk never found out what Mother Maggot's true goals in Alhaster were, but he did discover that the heretics met Mother Maggot in a subterranean room under a house in the southeast section of the city. Rhorsk kept an eye on the region for months afterward, but since nothing new developed he assumed Mother Maggot had moved on to other projects. He can supply the PCs with the house's exact address (following his directions brings the PCs to Sinner's Sanctum—area **10**).

If asked about Balakarde, Rhorsk can verify that the strange man visited him "just recently" (to Rhorsk, a span of several years is little different than several days). He also asked questions about the Ebon Triad and seemed particularly interested in what Rhorsk knew about Mother Maggot.

If controlled or made helpful, Rhorsk can even guide the PCs to the exact house under which Mother Maggot's chambers were hidden. He may also offer to heal the party's wounds, but in his madness he doesn't realize he's swapping out spells to cast *inflict wound* spells on those he thinks he's helping.

Ad-Hoc Experience Award: If the PCs manage to successfully interrogate Rhorsk and learn the location of the Well of Triptych Knowledge, award them experience points as if they had defeated a CR 15 creature in combat. Do not award them this bonus if they've already discovered the Well by other means.

Event 5: Heroic Competition

The PCs aren't the only "heroes" Zeech wants at his feast. He's already invited the leader of a group of hobgoblin mercenaries who have served his needs numerous times in the past. This hobgoblin is a loud and bombastic fighter named B'kruss. He is attended at all times by his cohort, a surprisingly clean hobgoblin

sorcerer named V'juss. A raucous raven always seems to perch on B'kruss' shoulder—this is Garg, V'juss' familiar. B'kruss calls his band of bandits the Knights of Redhand, and their accomplishments in Redhand (and the neighboring provinces) have earned them a place of notoriety in the region. The Knights of Redhand are staying at the Ogre's Hideout (area 13), but B'kruss and V'juss spend a fair amount of their time in the days before the banquet wandering the streets and looking for trouble. It doesn't take them long to learn that a group of heroes from the south has managed to weasel their way onto the invitation list, at which point they seek out the PCs.

Introduce B'kruss at some point after the PCs have received their invitations while they are moving about the streets of Alhaster. When the hobgoblins find the PCs, B'kruss bows before them and greets them as guests. His smile is wide, but a DC 15 Sense Motive check is enough to see that his politeness is a facade. B'kruss asks the PCs where they are from, and observes that their home is a place he had heard is violent and lawless—unlike Redhand. B'kruss immediately follows up his questions by asking what it is that the heroes have done that's so impressive that they got themselves invited to Zeech's party. No matter how the PCs reply, B'kruss does his best to belittle their claims, noting how he and his boys have accomplished even greater tasks here in Redhand. This encounter should play out as a contest of one-upsmanship, and eventually B'kruss asks one of the PCs to step forward to prove their skills to him.

B'kruss isn't looking for a fight—he's a hobgoblin, but he has little desire to attract the attention of the Blessed Angels. Instead, he proposes a friendly contest between himself and one of the characters. If the party refuses to meet his challenge, the hobgoblins walk away laughing, and are sure to bring up this incident during the feast. Of course, B'kruss suggests contests that he excels at; sample challenges include the following.

- "Hobgoblins are the greatest riders of all. It's a well-known fact. I bet I can outride any one of you!" In this contest, B'kruss challenges one of the characters to a mounted race around the city. B'kruss' mount is named Gristlegape, a tremendous dire boar stabled at the Ogre's Hideout. The PC is allowed to use any mount of his own in this race, as long as the mount doesn't fly. B'kruss proposes to start the race at the statue of Zeech in the marketplace (area 2), run up Crow Road, turn onto Arena Street all the way to the arena itself, wind through the alleys north to the Toilway, and then return to the statue in the marketplace. This race isn't about speed as much as it is about navigating around numerous obstacles that get in the way (pedestrians, other mounts, piles of rubble, merchant stalls). You can simulate the race by having B'kruss and the PC make seven opposed Ride checks. The first to win at least four of these checks wins the race.
- "I once had to leap over a thirty-foot-wide chasm filled with lava to get to a cowardly dragon. I reckon you would'a fallen to your death." For this wager, B'kruss leads the PCs to a nearby alleyway and picks two three-story buildings on opposite sides of a side street. The two buildings are thirty feet apart. He and the challenged PC are to head up to the roof and then make the 30-foot leap from one roof to the other. B'kruss takes the time to strip off his breastplate to increase his Jump check. There's enough room up there to get a running start, but it's still a DC 30 Jump check to make the leap. To simulate the danger of lava, B'kruss' allies clutter the street below with their weapons, arrows, jagged timbers, and other bits of pointy rubble they gather from surrounding alleys. A fall deals 3d6 falling damage and incurs 1d4+1 attacks from the improvised spikes (+10 melee, 1d4+4 damage). The higher Jump DC achieved is the winner (assuming the check was also high enough to clear the gap).
- "We hobgoblins have a special way to decide this type of problem. We call it the Mindless Courage of the Dreadful Mauling!" This contest is a timed event in which one participant (B'kruss) attempts to grapple and pin his dire boar mount for a minimum of three rounds. The hobgoblins set up a makeshift corral using commandeered wagons to form a forty-foot-radius circle. B'kruss goes first, and the challenged PC has to beat B'kruss' time in grappling the dire boar and keeping it pinned. B'kruss uses his dire boar mount in this match and is quick to point out that if the mount is hurt at all, the match is forfeit. Gristlegape the dire boar has participated in this contest many times before, and takes to it with a squealing glee—B'kruss is no more safe from accidental goring at the tusks of his own mount than are the PCs.

B'kruss

If the PCs win one of these contests, B'kruss and his allies grow sullen and

quiet. They know better than to take their confrontation up a notch, but nurture private hatreds of the PCs that may have repercussions later in the adventure.

Creatures: B'kruss is a sneaky hobgoblin captain who is in charge of the Northern borders, a region constantly harried by Reyhu orcs. He uses these brutal enemies to ensure that his own agenda is followed in the land. His methods are brutal and his justice long and cruel. His cohort V'juss is quiet and observant, and plays the role of a subservient minion well despite his deeply hidden desire to murder B'kruss and seize command of the Knights of Redhand for himself.

B'KRUSS **CR 14**

Male hobgoblin fighter 14
LE Medium humanoid (goblinoid)
Monster Manual 153
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen –1, Spot –1
Languages Common, Goblin

AC 27, touch 15, flat-footed 24
hp 119 (14 HD)
Fort +12, **Ref** +7, **Will** +3

Spd 30 ft. in armor (40 ft. base)
Melee *+2 spell storing bastard sword* +20/+15/+10 (1d10+9/17–20)
Base Atk +13; **Grp** +20
Atk Options Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge, Trample
Combat Gear *potions of cure moderate wounds* (2)

Abilities Str 16, Dex 17, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 12
Feats Exotic Weapon (bastard sword), Greater Weapon Focus (bastard sword), Greater Weapon Specialization (bastard sword), Improved Critical (bastard sword), Improved Grapple, Improved Unarmed Strike, Leadership, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Skill Focus (ride), Spirited Charge, Weapon Focus (bastard sword), Weapon Specialization (bastard sword)
Skills Jump +21 (+29 without armor), Move Silently +3, Ride +23
Possessions combat gear, *+3 breastplate, +2 heavy steel shield, +2 spell storing bastard sword (vampiric touch,* CL 10), *gauntlets of ogre power, ring of protection +2, boots of striding and springing*

V'JUSS **CR 10**

Male hobgoblin sorcerer 10
CE Medium humanoid (goblinoid)
Monster Manual 153
Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +0
Languages Common, Goblin, Orc

AC 13, touch 12, flat-footed 11
hp 55 (10 HD)
Fort +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +7

Spd 30 ft.
Melee mwk dagger +5 (1d4–1/19–20)
Ranged mwk light crossbow +8 (1d8/19–20)
Base Atk +5; **Grp** +4
Combat Gear *staff of fire* (24 charges)
Spells Known (CL 10th, +7 ranged touch):
5th (3/day)—*feeblemind* (DC 18)
4th (5/day)—*dimension door, lesser globe of invulnerability*
3rd (7/day)—*fireball* (DC 16), *haste, vampiric touch*
2nd (7/day)—*continual flame, invisibility, Melf's acid arrow, summon swarm*
1st (7/day)—*burning hands* (DC 14), *charm person* (DC 14), *color spray* (DC 14), *feather fall, magic missile*
0 (6/day)—*arcane mark, detect magic, detect poison, mending, message, ray of frost, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue* (DC 13)

Abilities Str 8, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 17
SQ summon familiar (raven named Garg)
Feats Combat Casting, Enlarge Spell, Improved Counterspell, Spell Penetration
Skills Bluff +16, Concentration +16, Diplomacy +5, Intimidate +5, Move Silently +6, Spellcraft +14
Possessions combat gear, masterwork light crossbow with 20 bolts, masterwork dagger, *amulet of natural armor +1*, dark velvet robes worth 250 gp

Gristlegape, dire boar: hp 52; *Monster Manual* 63.

Ad-Hoc Experience Award: If the PCs manage to best B'kruss' challenge, award them XP as if they had defeated a CR 15 creature in combat.

Event 6: The Justice of Zeech

Run this event the first time the PCs visit the Alhaster Marketplace—this event should give new arrivals in town a good idea of Alhaster's flavor and the strange sense of law and swift resolution for which Zeech is notorious.

A large crowd has gathered at the western end of the market. Angry shouting wells up from the mob, and it appears that their hatred is directed at a trio of figures who stand on a gallows, nooses limp around their covered faces. Standing nearby is a tall man, a symbol of a gauntleted hand clutching six downward-pointing arrows emblazoned on the front of his black robes; he holds up a hand and the crowd quickly falls silent. When the man speaks, his voice is shrill but filled with conviction.

"By the Grace of his Most Beautiful Majesty Prince Zeech, I condemn these wicked heathens to their fate—they are fortunate that Prince Zeech is merciful, for had I the power, their deaths would last a fortnight. And so by His Decree, let these heretics go to their maker!"

Shouts of "death to the Ebon Triad!" well up from the crowd as the robed figure turns to his left and pulls a lever. Trap doors snap open in the gallows floor, and the three hooded figures drop, kicking for a few moments before hanging still.

There is little that the PCs can do to interrupt this public execution without causing a scene or attracting the attention of the Blessed Angels. The three men being executed are indeed members of the Ebon Triad—low ranking cultists that bungled an operation in the Free City and managed to escape back to Alhaster only to be turned over to Zeech by Lashonna, who was eager to see them punished and to continue to give Zeech the false impression that he is still fully in control of the city. The executioner himself is an acolyte of Hextor who really knows little more than the fact that he was granted the honor of pulling the lever on these three heretics.

What should intrigue the characters more is the fact that the Ebon Triad seems to have a presence here in town. If they ask around about the Ebon Triad, the PCs quickly learn that no one in town wants to talk about them at all apart from cursing and spitting. Prince Zeech has all but declared war on the Ebon Triad, and as a result none of Alhaster's citizens

want anything to do with the group and take great pains to malign their name at every opportunity. Unfortunately, no one really seems to know much about them.

Once the bodies are executed, they are brought out to the Traitors' Graves and strung up on poles. This is standard practice for disposal of Ebon Triad bodies—what the people of Alhaster don't realize is that this effectively just returns their bodies to the Triad, since for many years a powerful draconic ally of the Triad has laired below these graves.

PART TWO: THE WELL OF TRIPTYCH KNOWLEDGE

Two locations in Alhaster are likely to draw the particular attention of the PCs: the Well of Triptych Knowledge and Ilthane's lair under the Traitors' Graves. The PCs can learn of these locations in numerous ways; via rumor, by speaking to Rhorsk, via divination magic, or even at one of the two sites themselves. They might not learn of their existence until later in the campaign, and could come back here to investigate at later dates as well. Exploration of these two sites is not required for the successful completion of the Age of Worms Adventure Path, although exploring them wraps up some of the earlier plotlines for the PCs and should give them additional resources to utilize in the battles to come.

The Well of Triptych Knowledge is where Lashonna, working with an avolakia envoy from the Wormcrawl Fissure named Mahuudril, founded the tenacious cult known to the PCs as the Ebon Triad. At the core of their machinations is a unique outsider bred and shaped by Mahuudril and Lashonna to serve as a focus for the misguided faith and devotional energy of the heretics they recruited from the churches of Hextor, Erythnul, and Vecna to populate the cult. Once the Ebon Triad was established, its agents spread throughout the world, working unknowingly to advance Lashonna's plans and make way for the Age of Worms. As the Ebon Triad grew, Lashonna withdrew from the project, leaving the day-to-day organization of the cult's actions and goals to Mahuudril, whom the heretics knew only as a mysterious cloaked figure called Mother Maggot.

Today, the Ebon Triad's operations are winding down. The Age of Worms is at hand, and those Ebon Triad cult cells that still operate wait patiently for the manifestation of their Overgod. The aspect of this Overgod waits within the Well of Triptych Knowledge—a physical manifestation of their misguided faith and devotional energies similar to the one the PCs fought at the end of "The Three Faces of Evil," only much more potent and dangerous, as this ebon aspect has been nurtured not by one single Ebon Triad cult, but by them all.

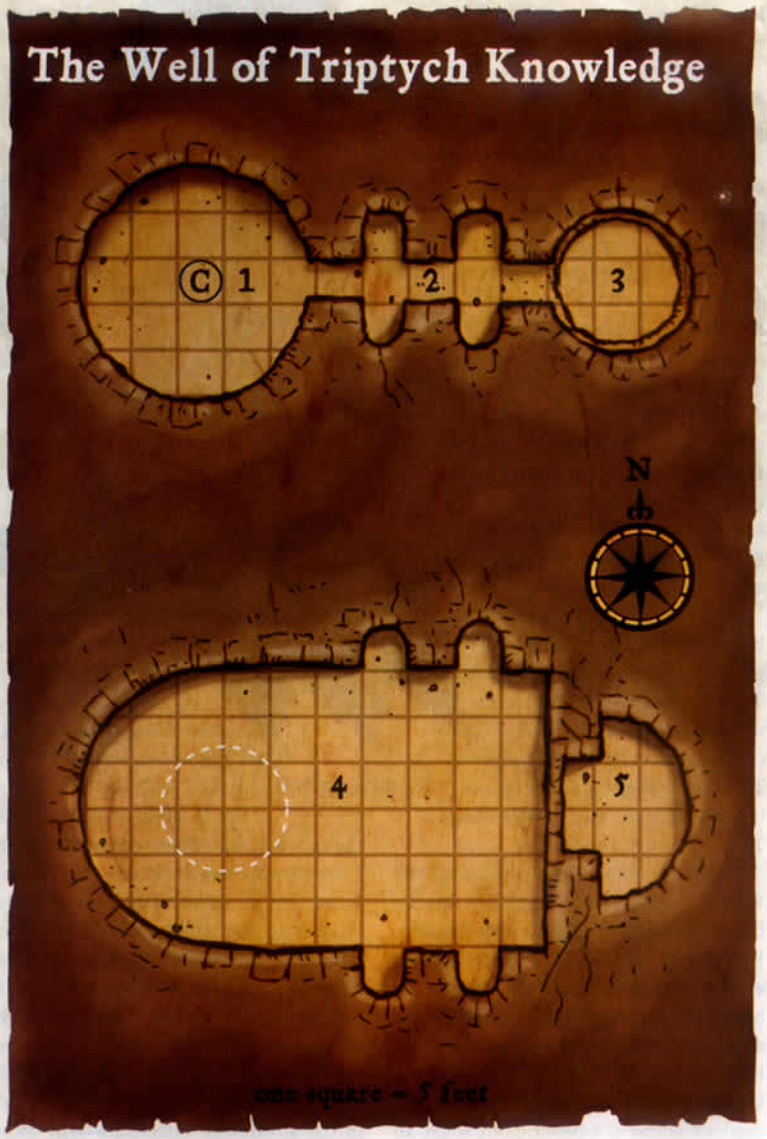
Once the Age of Worms begins, Mahuudril intends to grant control over the Ebon Triad to the ebon aspect, while she herself maintains control over it. By discovering and destroying this manifestation, the PCs can disrupt the Ebon Triad cult once and for all.

Mahuudril

The dungeon complex known as the Well of Triptych Knowledge lies directly under a sickhouse known as Sinner's Sanctum (area **10**). This squat building was built just under 10 years ago at the behest of Zeech the divine (secretly at the request of Lashonna), and has a single heavy timber door. Within, the incense-laden air fails to cover the unmistakable stink of sickness. A dozen poor souls, all in advanced stages of illness, are tended by a solitary woman named **Furpotia** (LN female human expert 2), an eccentric and half-mad woman chosen by Lashonna to tend the sick precisely for her insanity. Those who come to Sinner's Sanctum do not come to get well. They come to die. The threat of sickness and the rumors about the crazy old woman who tends the sick here are enough to keep anyone from looking too closely at the building, which is as Lashonna wishes it since the entrance to the Well of Triptych Knowledge is hidden in this building beyond a secret trap door.

Furpotia is fanatically loyal to Prince Zeech, and fully expects him to send a healthy supply of *potions of remove disease* as soon as he can afford the expense. She's been waiting for nearly a decade now, but she knows Zeech won't forget his promise. She doesn't allow visitors to the Sanctum unless they're obviously sick, in which case she tries to get the poor soul to lie down and wait for Zeech's medicine to arrive. The only exception is that she allows an acolyte of Wee Jas to stop by every few days to collect the dead. To the healthy, Furpotia's initial attitude is unfriendly—she must be friendly before she allows anyone into her sickhouse. If she or her wards are attacked, she begins shrieking and flees into the streets amid cries of "MURDER!" A group of four Blessed Angels arrives within 1d4+6 rounds to investigate.

If a character offers to use magic to heal her wards of their sickness, Furpotia is naturally suspicious. Unless she's first made friendly, she interprets the PCs' attempt to help as an attack and reacts as detailed above. If the PCs manage to befriend the crazy woman, she thanks them for their aid but refuses to leave the sickhouse, even if all the current



wards are cured. "There's more sickness to come, dearies. My place is here."

Furpotia is an elderly woman with ragged hair and an almost feral look in her eyes. She dresses in rags and spends her days concocting "potions and salves" to administer to her wards. Unfortunately, these potions are little more than rancid water and paste made from random plants that have no medicinal qualities (and indeed, often hasten the departure of those who take them). Furpotia's only possession of value is a *periapt of health*, given to her by Prince Zeech himself (actually Lashonna magically disguised as Zeech) as a token of his thanks for caring for Alhaster's sick. Furpotia thinks the periapt is merely a token of thanks from the prince, and ironically doesn't know of its magical properties. She interprets her continued health as proof that she has been "chosen" for her work.

The entrance to the Well of Triptych Knowledge is a hidden trap door in the back of the house. It can be found with a DC 25 Search check. Now that the Ebon Triad is firmly established in the world, its members haven't returned to this area. When the cult was in its infancy they utilized *sleep* spells on the sick and on Furpotia so they could come and go without being noticed. (Balakarde used a similar tactic to enter the place and search it at his leisure.) If shown the trap door, Furpotia is genuinely shocked, but she refuses to go down the iron ladder. "That hole just feels wrong, dearie. None of old Furpotia's business can be down there."

The shaft leads down 100 feet to a domed chamber (area 1).

1. The Hall of Gathering (EL 13)

The walls of this domed chamber are made of red brick and lined with stone beams that arch up to a point directly overhead where the shaft leads back up to the sickhouse. An iron ladder descends from this shaft into the middle of the room's floor. The chamber itself is empty, save for several rotting prayer mats strewn about. Each of these mats bears a simple black triangle. A five-foot-wide hallway leads east, and a large heap of tangled rope lies in its entrance.

This chamber is where the architects of the Ebon Triad spoke to those they had chosen to be the leaders and priests of the cult. These heretics were taught the beliefs of the Ebon Triad, and were given copies of a book called the *Way of the Ebon Triad* that would serve as their guide once they were in the world, leading their own cults. Lashonna and Mahuudril succeeded beyond their expectations with the cult, and today, the Ebon Triad is a self-sustaining organization that truly believes in its goal to unite Hextor, Erythnul, and Vecna into a supreme overgod. So powerful is their belief now that their clerics receive spells from prayer not from Kyuss, but from the power of their own devotion.

Creature: Balakarde fully intended to return to this dungeon after he finished exploring the Wormcrawl Fissure, and planned on bringing several allies to defeat the ebon aspect that dwells in area 4. In order to slow or prevent other members of the Ebon Triad from utilizing the Well until then, he left one of his

most potent servants here to guard the site. Unfortunately for the PCs, this hangman golem can't really tell the difference between adventurers and cultists.

A hangman golem can collapse into a pile of rope. As a full-round action, it piles up into the shape of a 10-foot-tall humanoid. The golem attacks as soon as anyone enters this area. It does not pursue characters out of the dungeon.

Hangman Golem **CR 13**

N Large Construct

Monster Manual III 69

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +0, Spot +0

AC 27, touch 11, flat-footed 25

hp 129 (18 HD); **DR** 10/adamantine

Immune magic; construct traits

Fort +6, **Ref** +8, **Will** +6

Weakness vulnerability to fire

Spd 30 ft. (can't run)

Melee 2 slams +20 (2d8+8)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft.

Base Atk +13; **Grp** +25

Atk Options constrict 2d8+12, improved grab

Special Atk rope whirlwind, strangle

Abilities Str 26, Dex 14, Con —, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 1

SQ unravel

Immunity to Magic (Ex) A hangman golem is immune to all spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural effects that allow spell resistance, except as follows. *Animate rope* hastens the golem (as if by the *haste* spell) for 5 rounds. *Rope trick* paralyzes the golem for 1 round (no save).

Rope Whirlwind (Ex) Every 1d4 rounds, a hangman golem can extend a number of ropes and spin, making a single slam attack against each creature within 10 feet. A hangman golem can't use its improved grab ability in conjunction with this ability.

Strangle (Ex) When a hangman golem grapples a living opponent, it can make a strangle attack as a standard action against the foe it grapples. The hangman golem and its foe make opposed grapple checks (or the foe can oppose with an Escape Artist check). If the hangman golem exceeds its opponent's check by 10 or more, it squeezes the breath from him. In addition to taking constrict damage, the foe is dazed for 1 round if it fails a DC 19 Fortitude save. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Unravel (Ex) Once per day as a standard action, a hangman golem can unravel its form to become a heap of tangled ropes that fills a 10-foot-by-10-foot area. While in this form, it cannot attack or move, but it gains fast healing 10. A hangman golem can reform into its humanoid appearance as a full-round action.

2. Guardian Niches

These alcoves once served as guardposts for potent undead minions of the cult of Kyuss. These undead have been returned to the Wormcrawl Fissure now that the Well has served its purpose. A DC 20 Search of these alcoves is enough to find a couple of long-dead dried green worms in the corners.

3. The Well of Triptych Knowledge

A fifteen-foot-wide pit yawns at the end of the short passage. The walls are lined with bricks and caked with mold and less-identifiable encrustations, and in the places where these growths aren't too thick, strange figures and runes are visible carved into the bricks.

The well is 300 feet deep, its walls covered with runes and pictographs written in avolakia. A DC 20 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check identifies the writing and its source (the avolakias are nightmarish intelligent worms with the capability to assume humanoid form), but does not decipher its meaning. Avolakia writing uses its own alphabet—a combination of hieroglyphics and curved tangles that doesn't resemble any other known language. If translated by someone fluent in this obscure language (or by magic), the carvings are revealed to be monstrously vile prayers to Kyuss. These prayers can be studied with an hour's worth of work, and contain a wealth of lore about Kyuss and his avolakia minions.

A recurring theme in the prayers is the mention of a ceremony known as The Ravenous Awakening. This ritual involves the animation of huge numbers of undead who are then led like cattle into vast banquet halls, where they present themselves to the feasters for consumption.

Further study reveals that while the avolakias worship Kyuss above all things, they also believe that his power is waxing. The passages suggest that Kyuss himself is trapped in some form of large stone monolith. He managed to partially escape this prison once, 1,500 years ago, but he was unable to maintain his freedom for longer than a few short months before the defeat of his armies by a force the avolakia refer to only as the Enemy forced him back into his monolithic prison.

More obscure mentions include reference to a location (phonetically translated as M'theskuss) called the Writhing Tabernacle, the place the avolakias seem to hold as the most holy site of Kyuss. Mention is also made of their great ally and the Voice of Kyuss, the Consort of the Five-Faced One, the eternal dragon Dragotha. M'theskuss and Dragotha are detailed further in "Into the Wormcrawl Fissure."

Ad-Hoc Experience Award: If the PCs decipher these runes, award them experience points as if they had defeated a CR 15 creature.

4. The Overgod's Court (EL 17)

The well empties through the ceiling of an immense chamber, its domed roof a full fifty feet over a black floor worn smooth by the passage of countless creatures. Alcoves in the north and south wall hold wretched statues of worm-like monsters coiled around pillars of skulls and bones. A single object occupies the room's eastern half—a huge statue of a three-headed, six-armed monster. It towers thirty feet high, a powerfully built creature missing two of its left hands and one of its right. The figure seems to be made of some strange stone that looks almost like leather in places, and the one good eye in its gaunt, skeletal face seems wet, soft, and almost alive.

The worm statues in the alcoves are depictions of avolakias, and are little more than unhealthy-looking statues. The "statue" in the center of the room

is something more. A DC 20 Knowledge (religion) check reveals aspects of Hextor (the six arms), Erythnul (the bestial shape and face) and Vecna (the missing eye and hands) in the statue. Characters who have played "The Three Faces of Evil" doubtless recognize the statue as a depiction of the Overgod, an aspect of which they fought and killed at the end of that adventure.

Creature: The statue of the overgod is not a statue at all, but a primal manifestation of the faith and devotion of the entire Ebon Triad, waiting patiently here in the depths of the Well of Triptych Knowledge for the Age of Worms and its appointed time to emerge into the world above. As soon as the ebon aspect sees intruders in its temple, it lurches into hateful life and does its best to destroy the intruders.

THE OVERGOD **CR 17**

Advanced Ebon Aspect
NE Huge outsider (evil)
DUNGEON #125

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +36, Spot +36
Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal

AC 26, touch 8, flat-footed 26
hp 285 (30 HD); **DR** 15/magic and good
Immune cold
Resist acid 10, fire 10; **SR** 26
Fort +22, **Ref** +17, **Will** +20

Spd 40 ft., climb 20 ft.
Melee* bite +30 (3d6+21/19–20) and 3 claws +28 (1d6+15/19–20)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.
Base Atk +30; **Grp** +49
Atk Options Awesome Blow, Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack
Special Atk bloodthirst of Erythnul, *standard of Hextor*

Abilities Str 33, Dex 10, Con 20, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 20
SQ blessing of Vecna
Feats Awesome Blow, Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Critical (claws), Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (claws)
Skills Climb +52, Concentration +38, Intimidate +38, Jump +48, Knowledge (religion) +34, Listen +36, Sense Motive +36, Spellcraft +34, Spot +36

Bloodthirst of Erythnul (Su) Once per day as a free action, the Overgod can enter a terrific fury for the duration of one round. During this round, the Overgod gains damage reduction 15/epic, fast healing 20, and a +8 profane bonus on attack rolls and damage rolls.

Standard of Hextor (Sp) Once per day as a free action the Overgod can cast *spiritual weapon* (caster level 20th) as a spell-like ability. The weapon that appears is Hextor's flail. The spiritual weapon attack has a +33/+28/+23/+18 attack roll and inflicts 1d8+5 points of force damage per hit.

Blessing of Vecna (Su) If a caster fails to overcome the Overgod's spell resistance with a spell, the Overgod heals damage equal to twice the level of the spell or effect.

*Includes adjustments for 10-point Power Attack

4. The Vault

The wall that separates this chamber from area 4 appears no different than any other wall. A DC 30 Search check is enough to reveal that the wall itself is hollow. It can be breached with magic or force.

The chamber beyond this room is one of several vaults kept by Lashonna throughout the world. This vault is used to store treasure and funds to finance the Ebon Triad. She has also taken to storing magic items that may some day aid her in a battle against her nemesis, Dragotha. The air in this vault is long-stale and without oxygen, so characters who enter the chamber without breaching the wall between it and area 4 must hold their breath or suffocate.

Brick Wall: 2 ft. thick; Hardness 8; hp 180; Break DC 37.

Treasure: Four chests the size of steamer trunks contain the bulk of the treasure in this room; each is *arcane locked* at caster level 13th, but none of them are trapped. The contents of these four chests are as follows.

Chest 1: 20 leather bags, each containing 1,000 gp.

Chest 2: A leather bag containing 1,000 pp, 9 leather bags each containing 2,000 gp in assorted gems.

Chest 3: Several racks containing potions and other magical elixirs. In all, this chest contains 10 *potions of cure moderate wounds*, 10 *potions of undetectable alignment*, 10 *potions of nondetection*, and 10 *elixirs of truth*.

Chest 4: This chest contains several magic items, most of which Lashonna recently gained from other victims of her vampiric hunger. She knows what they all do and can identify them by sight, but has yet to decide which members of the Ebon Triad have pleased her enough to deserve these awards. The items include a *ring of evasion*, a *rod of flame extinguishing*, a *wand of lightning bolt* (23 charges, caster level 8th), a *wand of haste* (19 charges), a *belt of dwarvenkind*, a *cloak of arachnida*, a *harp of charming*, and a small silk pouch containing four *beads of force*.

Also kept here is a large leather-bound ledger bearing no title. The contents are protected by a *secret page* spell (caster level 13th) that make the ledger seem to be nothing more than an out-of-date list of the vault's contents. In fact, the ledger is an exhaustive list of the members of the Ebon Triad, including its numerous allies and the locations in which these individuals live. Characters who peruse these secrets doubtless recognize some of the names that have had lines drawn through them: "Theldrick," "Loris Raknian," "Faceless One." The ledger gives only one entry for Alhaster: "Ilthane—Traitor's Graves." Other entries in the ledger can enable future strikes against the Ebon Triad as you see fit. The PCs can actually use this book as a checklist for all the remaining Ebon Triad cells in the world. The only members who aren't mentioned in the text are the cult's architects, Lashonna and Mahuudril.

Lashonna immediately recognizes any of the items from this chamber if the PCs display them openly in her presence. She must make a Bluff check to maintain her composure and to prevent a successful Sense Motive from determining her cleverly hidden startled reaction. She denies recognizing the object in any event, and figures that by letting the PCs maintain possession of these treasures they'll have a better chance of defeating Dragotha. She plans to reclaim the items from their bodies once the Age of Worms begins.

Ad-Hoc Experience Award: Discovering the true nature of the ledger effectively gives the PCs the tool they (or anyone else) need to wipe out the Ebon Triad, and is worth experience points as if the PCs had defeated a CR 18 creature in combat.

PART THREE: ILTHANE'S LAIR

The second site likely to invite PC investigation is Ilthane's Lair. They can learn that the black dragon they defeated in "A Gathering of Winds" lived under the Traitors' Graves in several ways. They might piece two and two together after hearing rumors on the streets, they could discover its location after reading the ledger in the vault of the Well of Triptych Knowledge, or they could even divine its location via magic. It's entirely possible the PCs won't discover the location of Ilthane's Lair until later in the campaign. Manzorian might even use a *sending* spell to alert them of the lair's proximity after he or one of his agents discovers the information while they continue to research the Ebon Triad back home.

Of course, there's also the chance that the PCs can stumble upon the lair by accident. In their investigations of the Ebon Triad, they are certain to learn that members of the cult who are captured and executed are put on display on the Traitors' Graves. If the PCs wish to interrogate one of the most recent bodies via *speak with dead* or similar methods, they'll need to find the body out on the low island itself, at which point they may well be assaulted by Ilthane's brood.

The Traitors' Graves (EL 14)

This low, sodden hummock of mud and rocky soil rises only a few feet above the dark brown waters of the slowly-flowing river. Here and there, tangled patches of wiry undergrowth grow, interspersed with muddy pools of water. Wooden frames in the shape of a Y protrude from the island here and there, and on some of them still hang the rotting bodies of traitors executed for heinous crimes. A startling number of crows perch on these frames or hop along the ground, where they hunt bugs and worms.

The Traitors' Graves are mentioned in the Alhaster Backdrop (area **39**). This low island in the Eel River can be reached at low-tide via a soggy strip of land that connects it to the mainland (although some wading in hip-deep water may still be required). At high tide, the island itself is surrounded by the muddy waters of the Eel River. Watchers who bring bodies here for display typically approach via skiff.

The island itself is pocked with muddy pools of water in which thousands and thousands of mosquito larvae writhe. The air is infested with these pests, to the extent that anything that wanders the island must make a DC 10 Fortitude save each minute to avoid becoming sickened by the thick humming clouds. In addition, a visit to the Traitors' Graves brings with it threat of contracting a variant form of cackle fever spread by mosquito bites. A DC 16 Fortitude save is enough to avoid catching the fever. This save must be made once per visit to the graves. Any creature with at least a +1 natural armor bonus or any form of damage reduction is immune to both the threat of nausea and disease. Watchers who make the trip out here with bodies carry *amulets of natural armor* +1 to ward off the mosquitoes.

Criminals who have been deemed traitors to Alhaster (including all members of the Ebon Triad) have traditionally been put on display here, their bodies strapped to a Y-shaped frame so that travelers along the Eel can look upon them and mock their fates. The three Ebon Triad cultists recently executed (see event 6 above) were scheduled to be put on display here as well, but the Watchers who were sent out to arrange this didn't quite make it.

Until recently, a large hidden cavern below this island served as the lair of a crafty black dragon named Ilthane. A pawn of Dragotha, Ilthane's purpose here was to keep an eye on Lashonna and the Ebon Triad, a job she performed with surprising skill. She was even contacted by the Ebon Triad recently to handle a problem to the south with some adventurers and a pesky wizard—unfortunately for Ilthane, these adventurers would be her doom.

A DC 15 Search of the island (likely after the PCs deal with the Creatures) turns up a skiff beached in the reeds along the western face of the island. This was the skiff the Watchers used to reach the island. The three bodies of the executed Ebon Triad cultists still lie heaped in the skiff's bow. If the right questions are asked with *speak with dead*, any of these bodies can hint at the location of the Well of Triptych Knowledge. None of these cultists has actually been to this site, but they've heard rumors of its existence in southeast Alhaster.

The entrance to Ilthane's lair is a cleverly hidden trap door covered with mud and wiry undergrowth. A DC 25 Search check uncovers it, but it weighs about 1,000 pounds—easy enough for a dragon like Ilthane to lift, but the PCs might have a little trouble if they don't have the four black dragons help them lift the heavy door. Under the door, a ten-foot-wide shaft drops 50 feet to a cavern below the island.

Creatures: After the dragon's defeat at the Whispering Cairn in "A Gathering Of Winds," Ilthane's Lair has remained empty until recently. Upon hearing of their mother's demise, four of Ilthane's young returned to her lair to try to claim her treasures as their own. These four dragons bickered and fought over the greatest prize, a fabulous alchemical laboratory that had been infused with the spirit of a watery genie known as a marid. This imprisoned marid knew many alchemical secrets, and it was under his guidance that Ilthane was able to craft the strange elixirs she used to augment herself, her offspring, and her minions.

Unfortunately, the four dragons broke the laboratory apart, and the marid's spirit was able to escape into the surrounding area. The interaction of the genie's soul with the large supplies of rare and exotic alchemical supplies gave birth to a monstrous amalgamation of acid, mud, magical compounds, and necromantic fury. The resulting creature, an acidwraith, drove the four dragons out of the lair and has lurked therein ever since.

The four dragons have since formed a tenuous alliance, and have tried twice

to defeat the acidwraith on their own to no success. Their current plan is to trick other creatures into entering the lair and defeating the acidwraith for them, at which point the dragons intend to swoop in and finish off their likely-wounded pawns. Alas, the four juvenile black dragons haven't quite figured out a good way to lure anyone out here. When the patrol of Watchers arrived recently, the dragons forced them into the lair but were disappointed to see the acid-wraith defeat them with ease. Now, as the PCs arrive at the island, the dragons try again.

Ilthane's brood are somewhat more dangerous than typical juvenile black dragons, as she performed several alchemical experiments on them as hatchlings. One of the side-effects of these experiments resulted in their eyes, which now smoke with a glowing green vapor.

ILTHANE'S BROOD (4) **CR 10**
Advanced juvenile black dragons
CE Medium dragon (water)
Monster Manual 70
Init +6; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., keen senses; Listen +20, Spot +20
Languages Draconic

AC 25, touch 10, flat-footed 25
hp 142 (15 HD)
Immune acid, paralysis, sleep
Fort +12, **Ref** +11, **Will** +9

Spd 60 ft., fly 150 ft. (poor), swim 60 ft.
Melee bite +20 (1d8+4) and
2 claws +17 (1d6+2) and
2 wings +17 (1d4+2)
Base Atk +15; **Grp** +19
Atk Options Flyby Attack
Special Atk breath weapon (60 ft. line, 8d4 acid damage, Reflex DC 20 half)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 4th)
3/day—*darkness* (40-ft. radius)

Abilities Str 18, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 10
SQ water breathing
Feats Alertness, Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Initiative, Multiattack, Weapon Focus (bite)
Skills Hide +20, Move Silently +20, Listen +20, Search +18, Spot +20, Swim +30

Tactics: As the PCs arrive on the island, the four dragons slither up from the waters nearby and demand an audience with the characters. They tell the PCs that their lair has been invaded by a tremendous creature, and if they can kill the monster, the dragons are willing to reward them handsomely. The dragons are poor diplomats and even worse liars, so when they refuse to settle on exact terms before the monster in their lair is slain, or when a PC sees through one of their Bluff checks when they promise not to betray them, the dragons instead try to physically force the PCs into the lair.

The dragons fight together, but won't risk their lives for their kin. If reduced to fewer than 30 hit points, a dragon flees to the north and does not return.

Ilthane's Lair (EL 16)

This earthen-walled cavern reeks of sharp, bitter chemicals strong enough to water the eyes and steal the breath. The walls of the cavern are a tangled mess of roots, mud, and stone. Water drips constantly from the walls, gathering in puddles on the floor and collecting in a fuming pool

to the east. North of the cavern entrance four large glass canisters once stood, although they have been shattered and their contents allowed to wash away. To the northeast, a ledge is heaped with smashed containers, crates, and other unrecognizable ruins. To the east, a second ledge is similarly cluttered, only this time with alchemical equipment and large, ruined tables of stone and wood.

This is where the dragon Ilthane lived, kept her treasure, and whiled away the hours with her enslaved marid genie creating and refining alchemical concoctions and fabulous elixirs. Many of these inventions were quite potent, with the capability to grant permanent boosts to ability scores, enhance breath weapons, grant immunity to acid, and other impressive effects. Sadly, when Ilthane's brood arrived, their bickering led to the accidental release of the marid's soul and the creation of a foul undead monster that destroyed most of these creations.

The chemicals in the air of this room burn and irritate. Any creature in this cavern must make a Fortitude save each round to avoid being sickened by the acrid tang—creatures with any resistance to acid whatsoever are immune to this effect.

The large pool of tainted liquid in the east is actually a pool of toxic chemical waste created by the spillage of the glass tanks of liquid to the west. The stuff deals 1d6 points of acid damage per round of exposure except in the case of total immersion, which deals 10d6 points of acid damage per round. Those who drink the liquid or breathe the fumes around it (which extend to five feet from the surface of the pool) become poisoned (Fortitude DC 15, initial and secondary damage 1d4 Con).

Creature: The acidwraith dwells in the large pool of toxic liquid. The horrific undead creature is insane with rage—given time, it may be able to collect its thoughts enough to focus its anger, at which point it could become a dangerous regional menace. For now, the thing knows only hatred, and anything it sees entering its lair becomes the focus of its wrath.

Acidwraith: hp 143; see Appendix.

Treasure: Most of Ilthane's treasure has been ruined by the acidwrath's corrosive presence. Thousands of corroded and useless coins and pieces of jewelry lie strewn about the cavern. Nevertheless, a few items of value survived. It takes a DC 25 Search check and a half hour of work to uncover this treasure.

The minor baubles (coins, surviving jewelry, and a mithral shield) are worth 4,000 gp in all, but the true treasures to be found here consist of three potent elixirs. Each vial is made of adamantine, and each elixir grants a permanent boon to the drinker. One elixir grants a +1 inherent bonus to Constitution and a +1 inherent bonus to Strength. The second grants a +2 inherent bonus to Charisma. The last elixir grants a permanent increase of +3 to the drinker's natural armor class, and in so doing covers his shoulders, forehead, arms, legs, and abdomen in thick black scales. Each of these elixirs is worth 55,000 gp and functions at caster level 17th.

PART FOUR: THE DAY OF GREAT REJOICING

At dawn on the seventh day of the PCs' visit to Alhaster, the characters are likely wakened by a tremendous din. Trumpets sound across the city, every drum, horn, and bell in every place of worship call out (as instructed) to announce that the Day of Great Rejoicing has arrived. The streets throng with happy, smiling faces, the locals cheer and rejoice, babies are held aloft and patriotic songs about the divine mercy of Zeech are sung at every corner. Those who listen closely or peer into the eyes of the joyful populace

can see the unmistakable traces of sadness and despair. Prince Zeech has ruled Alhaster through two decades of oppression and debauchery, and to most of the city's citizens, this festival is little more than a celebration of two more to come.

Before this event occurs, the PCs should take the time to ensure they'll be dressed appropriately. Wearing blood-stained armor to the event is a sure way to guarentee that no one will take them seriously. A DC 20 Gather Information check is good enough to learn what is and isn't expected. Armor isn't forbidden at Zeech's Gala, although it should be in good repair, clean, and not terribly out of style. Weapons are frowned upon—anyone who wears an obvious weapon to the gala is told that "Prince Zeech has no gladiatorial fights scheduled for today. Leave your weapons at home." Accessories and dress should be, at the minimum, on par with a courtier's outfit (30 gp) with at least 50 gp in jewelry or other accessories. Such dress is enough to allow a PC to function without penalty during the gala; characters who resist dressing to impress suffer a –4 penalty on all Charisma-based skill checks during the gala. Worse, whenever Authority Points are awarded, such slovenly PCs have a 50% chance of failing to earn any points at all.

It's impossible to overdress for the event. If you have players who wish to go all out on their character's appearance, consult issue #340 of *Dragon* for numerous additional ways the PCs can accessorize their gear and impress the prince.

Assuming the PCs have secured invitations to Zeech's Banquet (and that they've opened and read them), they know that a few hours before sunset, an official banquet carriage will arrive at their registered lodgings to bring them to Zeech's Palace (area **33**). When it arrives, the carriage is almost shocking in its decadence—a gold-plated vehicle of incredible size and garish ornateness waits for the PCs to board. A group of four trolls serve as "horses" for this ostentatious monstrosity, each dressed in ill-fitting suits designed to call out their hideous countenances all the more. The carriage itself is driven by a lanky, wide-mouthed man with black robes and a tall black top hat. A sizeable crowd gathers and gawks as the PCs board.

The carriage interior is incredibly sumptuous. The leather seats are padded with down and gold lanterns burn pleasantly-scented oil. A tray contains several crystal decanters of wine and silver salvers of sweet-meats (these items are worth a total of 350 gp if anyone should like to pocket them). The driver never speaks, and once the PCs are aboard takes them directly to Zeech's Palace.

The Palace

A brief description of Zeech's Palace appears on page 89 of this issue. As the gala unfolds, the guests are led from one room of the palace to another—the events detailed below provide more detailed descriptions of these areas.

Although the goal of this portion of the adventure is not combat or looting, the PCs should take note that Zeech's palace is far from easy pickings for thieves. Details on Zeech's guards (including the four erinyes devils that serve him as bodyguards) appear in the description of his palace in the backdrop in this issue.

PCs found wandering alone in the palace are discreetly but firmly directed back to the celebrations by palace guards, and should this occur more than twice that PC and any associates are ejected back onto the street.

Hosts and Guests

Apart from the PCs, Zeech has invited 13 other important guests to this gala. These guests are detailed in this section. Note that in addition to these 13 notables are many bodyguards, personal servants, heralds, and other hired help. These servants generally go unnoticed, but the mass of them certainly can't be ignored and they help to lend weight and importance as they cheer (as appropriate) at the events of the day.

The PCs can interact with these guests in any way they wish; each is presented with a description of their appearance, personality, and goals, so you can determine how they react to the PCs. Befriending these important guests can result in Authority Point awards or other benefits, but note that some of Zeech's guests are not allies to the PCs' cause, and it's possible for the characters to give up too much information about what they know of the Age of Worms if they're not careful.

Each guest is listed with his or her race, class and level, alignment, and any skill check modifiers that may be important during the adventure; all other statistics are omitted since combat is not the goal of this section of the adventure. Full statistics for some of the guests appear elsewhere in this adventure or in other installments of the Age of Worms adventure path; in these cases, sources for the full statistics are given. At the end of each guest's description that person's initial attitude toward the PCs is listed, along with the conequences of successfully changing this attitude to something different.

Prince Zeech

LE male human fallen paladin 8/blackguard 8 ("Dawn of A New Age," *Dungeon* #135)

Skills: Bluff +17, Diplomacy +28, Intimidate +15, Sense Motive +22

Appearance: Prince Zeech is a handsome man in his early forties, but a life of decadence and heavy spending has left him with the countenance of a man much younger. He wears his hair loose and just off his shoulders, and dresses at the cutting edge of the current style.

Personality: Zeech is in a somber mood during much of the festival, despite the furious attempts of the nobles and his servants to cheer him up. His great task (the construction of the ziggurat and tower) is not yet complete, and his past is troubling his dreams. He remains fairly quiet during the gala, remaining observant and allowing his fool the Ominous Fabler to do most of the talking on his behalf, listening closely to whispered words from his master and announcing them in his own unique manner. Anyone in close conversation with Zeech can make a Sense Motive check opposed by his Bluff check. Success allows the character to note a terrible sadness hidden under his facade. Discussing the Prince's hidden sadness at any point in Zeech's earshot immediately offends him (see below).

Goals: Zeech's initial goal is two-fold—he wants to find out which of his guests support the construction of his project, and he wants to reinforce his image as being the most powerful and most "cultured" citizen of Alhaster. If every one of his guests leaves an ally and a stronger supporter than when they arrived, he'll count the gala a success. On the morning of the festival, he learns that the PCs have secured invitations and hurriedly consults his advisors about them, learning of their involvement with the Champion's Games in the Free City and their ties to Diamond Lake, but little more. He is an excellent judge of character, and upon meeting the PCs realizes that they are destined for great things. As the gala goes on, he pays particular attention to them, hoping to learn everything he can about them before the night is up.

Offending the Prince: At various points during the party, it's possible to personally offend Prince Zeech. If this occurs, the offending PC must immediately make a Diplomacy check opposed by Zeech's Diplomacy check. Success indicates that Zeech takes the offense as a good-natured ribbing and dismisses it with a laugh. Failure indicates that Zeech does the same, but at the first opportunity he sends a secret message to the cooks in his kitchens and has that character's portion of food during the feast laced with a special poison he developed over the years—a toxin distilled from sea urchins. Zeech calls the stuff Redhand Ikrus. The stuff is tasteless and impossible to detect without magic. Since the effects of this poison are delayed, you shouldn't ask for Fortitude saves as the character eats—simply note how many courses the PC takes part in during the feast. Six hours after the feast, the character must make that many DC 18 Fortitude saves as his body suddenly seizes up in painful spasms and begins to rot. Each failed save results in 1d6 points of Constitution drain. Creatures slain by Redhand Ikrus quickly melt away into noxious green stains, bones and all.

Initial Attitude: Unfriendly. *Hostile:* Zeech ejects the characters from the gala, and sends four Blessed Angels to assassinate them later in the evening. *Friendly:* Zeech asks that character to sit at his end of the table during the feast. *Helpful:* Zeech is so impressed with the characters that he not only invites them to sit at his end of the table during the feast, but also points out their qualities as things the other guests should strive for. This nets the party an award of 1 Authority Point, but jealousy creates a –2 penalty on all other Diplomacy checks made against the other guests for the remainder of the evening.

The Ominous Fabler, Zeech's Fool

CN male spriggan rogue 12/bard 2 ("Kings of the Rift," *Dungeon* #133)

Skills: Bluff +20, Diplomacy +10, Intimidate +17, Perform (comedy) +15, Perform (oratory) +12, Perform (wind instruments) +5, Sense Motive +15

Appearance: The Ominous Fabler looks like a sinister little man who stands only two-and-a-half feet high. He constantly clutches a mummified raven to his chest and always looks nervous. He's dressed in crimson leather armor and wears a strange, three pointed but floppy hat wrapped in black and white

The Fabler's History

Nearly a year ago, a stone-giant chieftain named Thane Kolvant Granitebones had a terrifying dream—he saw a blackened monolith rising from the ground and spitting poison into the air that caused the dead to rise from their graves and the land to be consumed by worms.

Thane Kolvant consulted his adviser and fool, a spriggan known as The Ominous Fabler, who advised his master to seek the meaning of the dream by consulting an oracle named Gryzz. She gave Thane Kolvant a dire prophecy that predicted the ruin of his tribe, and the thane reacted with panic. As he took plans to gather the giants of the Rift Canyon together to defend themselves from this coming doom, he sent the Ominous Fabler out into the world to seek out the true meaning of the prophecies.

The Ominious Fabler, being quite intelligent and knowledgeable, quickly determined that the city of Alhaster would play a prominent role in the dark age to come. He came to Redhand to investigate, and found Alhaster.

Seeking employment within the palace, the spriggan was unlucky enough to be caught stealing in the kitchens. In the ensuing chase, the guards cornered him on the Vertiginous Terrace as Prince Zeech was within. Just as he was about to be dispatched, the spriggan begged the prince to give him one chance to impress him before he was cast onto the rocks below. Zeech was bored and granted the strange little man his request, and the Fabler told an especially brutal tale about a band of hateful ravens that collected human eyes to create a magic guardian called a Watching Tree. Of course, Prince Zeech found the tale quite amusing and immediately promoted the Ominous Fabler to the worst position imaginable in the kingdom—Entertainer to the Prince (previous occupants of this position have been variously boiled, eaten, and burned alive after some happenstance remark or ill-chosen phrase before the insane prince.)

Of course, this is all according to plan for the Fabler, who now uses his position in the palace to gather what information he can about the coming Age of Worms.

ribbons and studded with gems.

Personality: The Ominous Fabler follows the Prince everywhere he goes, using his considerable talents at insults and sarcasm to mock and belittle the guests as much as he can. Zeech feigns shock at these comments and swipes at the fool with anything handy, but a DC 20 Sense Motive check is enough to get the idea that the twisted little man is saying what Zeech wants him to say.

Goals: The Ominous Fabler has a secret goal in Alhaster; he's in town investigating the nature of the Age of Worms at the request of his true patron, a giant king named Granitebones.

Initial Attitude: Indifferent. *Helpful*: The Ominous Fabler takes note of the PCs—when they meet him again in "Kings of the Rift," he may provide them some aid.

The Help

LN human commoners 1–3

Skills: None noteworthy.

Appearance: These overworked men and women consist almost entirely of freaks Zeech recently hired away from Montague Marat. Characters who visited the Emporium in Diamond Lake may recognize some of them—fat ladies, pinheads, men without legs, women without eyes, and all manner of deformity is on display. Zeech fired his regular servants, retaining only his cooks and guards while replacing the rest with these folk, with whom he has a strange obsession. During the course of the celebration the heroes should be served wine by Afus, the Man with No Head (whose face in his chest), attended by Madam Hog, the Pig Woman (whose face is more akin to a sow than a human), and led to their chairs by Ekestra, the Half-Man (who walks on his hands as he has no lower body).

Personality: These men and women may be overworked, but this is the first time in their lives they've been paid a fair wage and have been given any privacy; each has been given their own room in the palace. They have become quite loyal to Zeech as a result, and have nothing ill to speak of him.

Goals: Stay on Zeech's good side.

Initial Attitude: Indifferent. *Hostile*: The servant complains to Zeech, who becomes offended. *Helpful*: The servant takes a liking to the PC, and quietly warns him if he offends the prince.

B'kruss

LE male hobgoblin fighter 14

Skills: Bluff +1, Diplomacy +1, Intimidate +1, Sense Motive –1

Appearance: B'kruss is a tall, well-groomed hobgoblin with a raven perched on one shoulder.

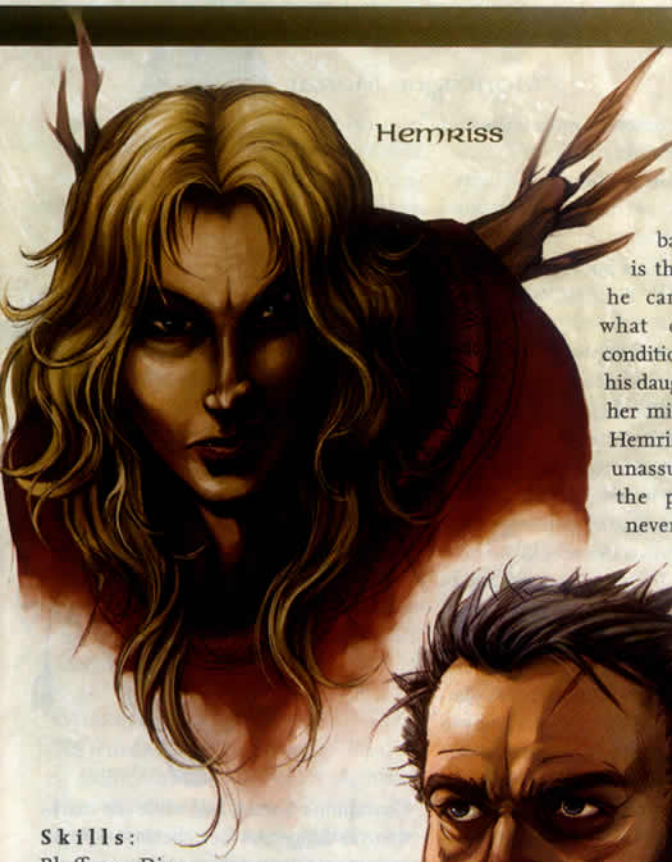
Personality: The PCs likely met B'kruss earlier, and know his facade of politeness and compliments is just that. In fact, the hobgoblin is a petty thug who'll do anything to achieve his goals.

Goals: B'kruss wants to impress Zeech at the party and hopefully land some sort of commission as a bodyguard or assassin. His attempts to curry Zeech's favor backfire at some point during the party and he offends the Prince, who has him poisoned during the feast.

Initial Attitude: Variable—if he humbled the PCs earlier in event 5, his initial attitude is indifferent (he views the PCs as foolish mercenaries barely deserving of his attention). If the PCs humbled him, his initial attitude is hostile, and if he's not made at least indifferent before event 11, he challenges one of the PCs to a duel before Zeech at some point before the feast in an attempt to gain Zeech's favor by defeating one of them. A DC 15 Knowledge (nobility and royalty) check is enough for the PC to realize that he can refuse the challenge honorably since it's somewhat unseemly to fight at a party. If the PC accepts the challenge, Prince Zeech brings his guests to one of the gardens he uses for dueling. The rules of the duel are up to the PC (as the challenged) to decide. If the PC fails to win the duel, he offends the prince. No matter how this duel turns out, B'kruss automatically offends the prince—his poisoning is assured the instant he makes his challenge.

Hemriss

LE female half-fiend human rogue 8/assassin 10 ("Dawn of a New Age," *Dungeon* #135)



Hemriss

Skills: Bluff +25, Disguise +25, Diplomacy +29, Sense Motive +24

Appearance: Hemriss is a strange combination of the beautiful and the grotesque. She's a half-fiend human—her mother was an erinyes devil, and rumor holds that her father is Prince Zeech. She certainly shares Zeech's piercing blue eyes. Her beauty is marred by two unfortunate physical deformities. First, her face is misaligned; the right half of her face is about a half inch above the left, giving her nose an ugly twist and her mouth a perpetual upturned sneer. Second, her back is hunched with malformed wings; broken feathers protrude here and here from these mockeries, and she tries to cover them with a fine cloak but isn't always successful. Her expression is one of bitter cruelty.

Personality: Hemriss is the vile leader of a traveling band of warrior-gypsies who wander Redhand enforcing the secret will of Prince Zeech. It's suspected that the deformed woman is Zeech's daughter, but neither has ever publicly confirmed the relation. Certainly, her appearance lies at the root of Zeech's fascination with deformity—always at the back of his mind is the hope that if he can understand what causes these conditions, he can offer his daughter a cure for her misshapen form. Hemriss is quiet and unassuming during the party, and is never far from her father's side.

Kilraven

Goals: Hemriss' purpose at the party is simple—she's there to watch and observe for her father, to determine if any of his guests have ulterior motives and to defend him if the need arises.

Initial Attitude: Unfriendly. Any Diplomacy check to curry Hemriss' favor that incorporates compliments on her appearance (well-meaning or otherwise) suffers a –10 penalty on the check. *Hostile:* Hemriss indicates to her father that the PCs may be trouble, and he immediately makes the secret order to have their food poisoned. *Helpful:* Hemriss quietly entrusts one of the other PCs with her suspicion that Miszen has some sinister motives at the party, and asks the PCs to help try to determine what her true goals are.

Hoff

NE male dwarf fighter 11

Skills: Bluff –1, Diplomacy –1, Intimidate +14, Sense Motive +0; Strength check +5

Appearance: Hoff is an almost impossibly fat dwarf with a rosy red nose and piggy eyes dressed in browns and reds.

Personality: Hoff is foul-mannered and slightly insane, but he's on his best behavior during this party, and lets slip only a few minor profanities here and there. He's often found near the food, as he eats and drinks prodigiously.

Goals: Hoff's goals at the party are simple. He's here to get free food, free alcohol, and maybe to have a little fun on the side.

Initial Attitude: Unfriendly. *Friendly:* Hoff challenges the strongest-looking PC to arm wrestle. Resolve this bout as "best two out of three" opposed Strength checks. If beaten, Hoff becomes unfriendly, but if he wins, he immediately becomes helpful. *Helpful:* Hoff invites the PC to join his mercenary band. The repercussions of this choice are beyond the scope of this adventure, but needless to say, a good character who works for Hoff can expect to be put in a situation where his morality is tested sooner than later.

If Hoff is made helpful, award the PCs one Authority Point.

Lord Malaven Kilraven

LN male human aristocrat 5/fighter 8

Skills: Bluff +11, Diplomacy +13, Intimidate +18, Sense Motive +7

Appearance: Lord Kilraven is an iron-haired, weather-beaten man with a hook instead of a right hand. He carries himself with pride and speaks with a strong, clear voice.

Personality: Kilraven is the trusty captain of the West Border Watch, an honorable man who has served under three generations of leaders within Redhand. Although his loyalty is to the kingdom he is dutiful and would never seek to be called a traitor. He follows the prince's

orders as he must. He assumes the PCs are mercenaries Zeech took a liking to for some heinous trait, and this assumption colors his initial appraisal of them in a poor light.

Goals: Kilraven attended the gala only because he interpreted the invitation as a direct order from his prince. During the festival, he plays the role of a bemused noble to perfection.

Initial Attitude: Unfriendly. *Friendly*: Kilraven realizes that the PCs aren't Zeech's agents, and takes note of their actions and words. *Helpful*: Kilraven seeks to befriend the PCs, and given some privacy, admits to them that he hopes to live to see Alhaster freed from Zeech's rule. He believes that the majority of its citizens are honest folk, and given the chance, would throw off Zeech's rule. He doesn't quite ask the PCs to aid in staging a coup, as he feels that the time is not yet right, but he will ask them to stay in contact with him as things advance.

If Kilraven is made helpful, award the PCs one Authority Point.

Lashonna

LE very old vampiric silver dragon ("Dawn of A New Age," DUNGEON #135)

Skills: Bluff +17, Diplomacy +28, Intimidate +15, Sense Motive +22

Appearance: Lashonna's public figure is that of an incredibly beautiful elven woman with long silver hair. She is never seen in public wearing the same outfit more than once, and her voice is almost supernaturally charming and soothing to listen to.

Personality: Lashonna's silken tongue and grace are known throughout Alhaster. She is surprisingly easy to get along with, yet notoriously difficult to learn anything about. Soft-spoken and mirthful, her disapproving glance alone has been enough in the past to send those she has become offended by to commit suicide.

Goals: Lashonna's goals at the party are simply to be seen; she arrives late and leaves early, leaving everyone else at the party grateful and proud that they were at the same gathering as she. The one thing that she does not expect at the party are the PCs, and they'll have a rare opportunity to speak to the mysterious woman at the start of the next adventure.

Initial Attitude: Helpful.

Mahuudril

CE female avolakia sorcerer 14 ("Into the Wormcrawl Fissure," DUNGEON #134)

Skills: Bluff +36, Diplomacy +42, Intimidate +38, Sense Motive +18

Appearance: To the people of Alhaster, Merchantmaster Mahuudril is an exotic and mysterious human woman in her late fifties with a thin face that has aged well. She wears her shocking red hair in braids woven around an elaborate headdress. Her clothes are rich and royal, and she wears too much jewelry. Her expression is mischievous and sneaky, a young grandmother who's plotting the best way to sneak some candy to a grandchild. In truth, Mahuudril is one of the wormlike avolakia—she uses her *polymorph* spell-like ability to maintain her human appearance. If the PCs discern her true form (with *true seeing*, for example) and raise an alarm, she teleports to safety. Forcing her to flee puts a brief kink in the party, but Zeech is quick to do what he can to smooth things over. If the PCs expose Mahuudril's true form, the resulting chaos brings the party to an abrupt end. In either case, the PCs offend the prince. In the event that the party ends before the PCs have a chance to contact Lashonna, she contacts them herself on the pretense that she wishes to speak to them about the events that led to the party's abrupt end.

Personality: Mahuudril is an enigma—not many people in town know much about her, and that's the way she likes it. Her quick wit and sense of humor make her easy to like or hate.

Goals: Mahuudril's goal at the party is to size up what the other movers and shakers of Alhaster have been up to. When she realizes that the PCs are at the party, she becomes interested in them but doesn't want to appear so interested that they become curious about her in turn. She's heard rumors of the heroes who have caused the Ebon Triad so much trouble and who stopped Loris Raknian's plans for the Champion's Games, and while she marks them as dangerous foes, she does not take any actions against them at this time.

Initial Attitude: Hostile. Mahuudril cannot be swayed from her opinions of the PCs by diplomacy, but she doesn't let her hatred show to them. In fact, if she gets the idea that the PCs have taken any real notice of her at all, she feigns illness and leaves the party as soon as she can do so gracefully and without drawing too much attention.

Professor Montague Marat

N male human aristocrat 9

Skills: Bluff +14, Diplomacy +18, Intimidate +4, Sense Motive +14.

Appearance: This wide-faced human man is in his late fifties. He has rosy cheeks and a pair of wire spectacles, and is dressed in a clashing riot of flamboyant clothing and a strange pointed hat. His expression is one of vivacious energy and glee.

Personality: Montague Marat is the former "associate" of Zalamandra (hostess of the Emporium in Diamond Lake), although he abandoned his position some years ago to seek his fortune elsewhere. He came to Alhaster and found the place quite matched his temperament. When he heard of Ilthane's attack on Diamond

Lake, he sent a boat to invite his one-time employees to join him in Alhaster. In fact, he knew of Prince Zeech's curious fascination with freaks, and when his "friends" arrived he hired them away to the Prince for a healthy profit.

Goals: Montague's primary concern is to enhance his presence as one of the newest aristocrats of Alhaster. He does his best to befriend everyone at the party, and if the PCs are accepted warmly by others, he's there to ride their coattails.

Initial Attitude: Friendly (unless the PCs have already established a different relationship with the Professor). *Helpful*: Montague feels a kinship for fellow survivors of Diamond Lake, and offers to put them up at his expense at the Deluxury for a few weeks until they get their footing in Alhaster.

Miszen Mitchwillow

NE female halfling sorcerer 15

Skills: Bluff +24, Diplomacy +8, Intimidate +8, Sense Motive +1

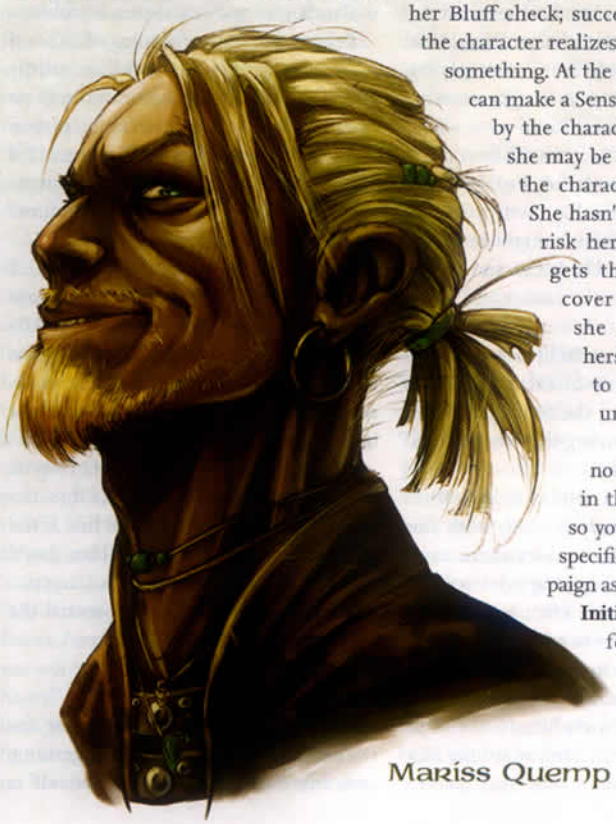
Appearance: Although slightly overweight and a little nervous looking, Miszen remains rather cute in appearance. She's got light brown hair, wears an amulet made of snake scales and teeth, and dresses in a black cloak and fine noble's clothes in dark shades of blue and green.

Personality: Miszen's a quiet, observant woman who has an uncanny knack to melt into the crowd. A well-respected merchant in the region, rumors of her powerful spellcasting capabilities abound. Zeech invited her to the party in an attempt to curry her favor so he can perhaps secure the expensive imported goods he enjoys at a less expensive price.

Goals: Miszen is in fact a spy from Dorakaa in the Empire of Iuz. Her goals in the Bandit Kingdoms are to keep an eye on politics and to advise her leader accordingly, should he ever wish to move against one of the provinces. Her role as a merchant is completely fabricated, a testament to several months of laying groundwork for her false identity and her skill at lies. Anyone in a long conversation with her about her business or history may Sense Motive against her Bluff check; success indicates that the character realizes Miszen is hiding something. At the same time, if she can make a Sense Motive opposed by the character's Bluff check, she may be able to learn that the character is on to her. She hasn't come this far to risk her cover, so if she gets the idea that her cover is in jeopardy, she politely excuses herself and teleports to safety once she's unobserved.

Miszen has no further role to play in the Age of Worms, so you can develop her specific role in your campaign as you see fit.

Initial Attitude: Indifferent. *Helpful*: Miszen may be smitten with a male halfling in the party, although she's careful to keep business separate from pleasure, and certainly won't reveal her secret unless she believes her lover would be an ally to her cause.



Mariss Quemp

Mariss Quemp

CN male half-orc barbarian 4/fighter 8

Skills: Bluff +1, Diplomacy +1, Intimidate +13, Sense Motive +0

Appearance: Mariss is a half-orc, although as half-orcs go, he's actually rather handsome, with his orc heritage almost unnoticable. Well-groomed and always dressed in the finest clothing, his towering frame still seems as if it would be more at home in a battle than at a party.

Personality: Mariss is a reformed barbarian. He retains the loud, infectious laugh of his youth and an equally loud voice, but he's abandoned his rough and foul manner for the cultured way of the aristocrat. He's quite popular with the other nobles, who can't get enough of his violent stories and ribald jokes.

Goals: Mariss has grown tired of his current two wives, and hopes to find someone new to bring home to Quemp Manor at this party.

Initial Attitude: Indifferent. *Friendly*: Mariss may become smitten with a female PC, and promises her wealth and eternal happiness if she consents to become his bride. If the character agrees, he demands that the ceremony take place the very next day at the cathedral of Hextor. That Mariss already has two wives doesn't matter to him, although he doesn't bother to mention this fact until he and his new bride are married.

If Mariss is made helpful, award the PCs one Authority Point.

Shag Solomon

N male quaggoth aristocrat 6

Skills: Bluff +7, Diplomacy +11, Intimidate +3, Sense Motive +7.

Appearance: Shag Solomon is a true curiosity. Known as a cultured "wild man" from the northern pine forests, he is actually a mild-mannered quaggoth, a humanoid creature whose kind are normally known for their bestial fury. Solomon's vicious teeth and jagged claws contrast with his gentleman's garb and cultured demeanor.

Shag Solomon

Personality: Shag Solomon, normally calm and collected, has found the move to Alhaster doesn't fit him. He had thought his old friend Montague had found him a legitimate place in Alhaster's society, but when he tried to hire him away to Zeech, Shag refused. Zeech, happy with his acquisition of more than a dozen other freaks, allowed the refusal to stand, and since then Shag's spent his time at the Deluxury, sulking and drifting in an opium haze. In an attempt to rekindle his friendship, Montague secured an invitation for Shag to the party.

Goals: Shag initially didn't want to go to the party, but once he arrives he finds the attention the others give him to be quite refreshing and quickly settles back into the role of the storyteller and gentlemanly braggart. His hidden desire is to replace Montague in Alhaster's aristocracy, and given the chance he consults with other aristocrats to determine how best this can be done.

Initial Attitude: Indifferent. *Helpful*: Shag Solomon recognizes one of the PCs from their Diamond Lake days, and promises him wealth and fame if he helps Shag to become accepted in Alhaster's aristocracy.

Toris

NG male gnome aristocrat 11

Skills: Bluff +3, Diplomacy +17, Intimidate +3, Sense Motive +0

Appearance: Toris is an extraordinarily long-nosed gnome with a magnificent handlebar moustache.

Personality: Of the guests at the party, Toris is the most naive. He's also the only noble from an outlying province in the Bandit Kingdoms who accepted Zeech's invitation.

Goals: Toris is unsatisfied and depressed by the greed, cruelty, and hate that festers in his own province, and hopes that Alhaster might harbor a society more suited to his tastes. As the gala goes on, he realizes more and more that Alhaster is much worse than home; the sight of his blanching face and gaping mouth at some of the more decadent events during the festival is cause for much mirth among the other guests, Zeech in particular.

Initial Attitude: Friendly. *Helpful*: Toris becomes exceedingly friendly with the PCs and follows them everywhere, even after the gala is over, hoping to learn more about them. If there is a female gnome in the party, Toris tries to win her love with expensive gifts (up to a total value of 5,000 gp in all) and promises of eternal happiness if she'll only marry him.

If Toris is made helpful, award the PCs one Authority Point.

V'juss

CE male hobgoblin sorcerer 10

Skills: Bluff +16, Diplomacy +5, Intimidate +5, Sense Motive +0

Appearance: A tall, lanky hobgoblin, V'juss wears long, flowing robes and a bit too much perfume for a male hobgoblin.

Personality: V'juss is quiet and observant, and has little to say during the gala.

Goals: As B'kruss' cohort, V'juss had little to say when he was told he was going to this event. He has a feeling that B'kruss may bite off more than he can chew, and is ready to cut him loose at the right time so he can assume command of the Knights of Redhand.

Initial Attitude: Indifferent. When around B'kruss, V'juss takes pains to support his boss' opinions, but has none regarding the PCs himself.

Captain Vulras

CG human male ranger 9/rogue 7

Skills: Bluff +15, Intimidate +18, Sense Motive +9.

Appearance: Vulras is a dark-skinned man with a small neat goatee. He is dressed in flamboyant and very expensive robes.

Personality: Vulras commands a band of rangers to the north who are coldly efficient and sometimes brutal in their work against the Reyhu orcs who plague the northern reaches of Redhand. Yet for all their brutality, Vulras has managed to retain a strong core of kindness to his fellows.

Goals: Vulras doesn't approve of Zeech's rule, and secretly hopes to aid in overthrowing him at some point. His goal at this party is to appraise the palace and city defenses and to look for weaknesses in Zeech's character that he might be able to exploit in the future.

Initial Attitude: Indifferent. *Helpful*: Vulras confides in the PCs his dissatisfaction with Zeech, and hints that if the PCs ever made a move against him, they'd find support in Vulras and his rangers.

If Vulras is made helpful, award the PCs an Authority Point

Events in the Palace

Zeech's gala is scheduled to last for twelve long hours of feasting, gaming, and entertainment. The gala itself is

presented as several events, each with its own opportunities for the PCs to learn a little bit about their host or work on their reputations with the nobles of the city. The majority of the adventure's Authority Point awards can be earned during these events, as the manner in which the PCs present themselves to the nobles and Zeech himself have the greatest impact on the city. If the nobles approve of the PCs, the citizens certainly will as well (at least, in public they will).

As you run these events, be sure to give the PCs plenty of time to interact with the other guests beyond what may occur during the events themselves.

Event 7. The Celebration Begins

Beyond the gates of Zeech's Palace is a steep rising path, flanked by polished skeletons in gibbets. The path winds up the rocky promontory upon which the palace and its grounds are constructed. When the PCs' carriage reaches the top, they are asked to decoach and are then led to the Vertiginous Terrace—a lawn that overlooks a 200-foot-drop into the Nyr Dyv. Other guests have already arrived, and they mill about in small groups, talking quietly. Several of the guests carry wrapped gifts for Zeech, and if the PCs think to ask, they might be able to race out and find a gift for the prince if they didn't realize this was expected.

About 20 minutes later, Zeech arrives amid great fanfare with his fool, the Ominous Fabler. Flanked by his deformed servants, Zeech stands quietly while his fool steps forth, clutching his mummified raven, and blows on a strange horn to attract everyone's attention (a needless move, since by this point everyone's attention is already focused on the prince). The Ominous Fabler clears his throat, and then speaks in a surprisingly strong and deep voice.

"My lords, ladies, and other honored guests! Prince Zeech bids you welcome, and I trust you will enjoy the hospitality of his humble home!" The strange little man looks around, leers at some of the guests, then flaps his free arm and lifts the mummified raven up on his shoulder. Using the dead bird as a ventriloquist's dummy, he chirps out in a raspy voice: "You may now present your gifts to honor the prince!" and then steps back, giggling quietly as the other guests reach into folds in cloaks and pockets.

Nothing in the invitation indicated that the guests were expected to bring gifts for Zeech, and unless the PCs realized this before the party and secured gifts, they'll either need to scrounge a gift from their possessions or do some fast-talking. Any gift worth less than 2,000 gp runs a chance of offending the prince, as does giving no gift at all (unless the PC can successfully Bluff Zeech that his gift is "on the way" and will arrive the next day). An unwrapped gift worth at least 2,000 gp is fine, as long as the PC presents it with a DC 20 Diplomacy check (otherwise he runs a chance of offending the prince). The gifts from other attendees include jewelry, bottles of rare wine, exotic caged animals, and in the case of Mahuudril, a fiendish horse outfitted with *horseshoes of a zephyr*.

Notable in her absence is Lashonna. Before the party begins in earnest, Zeech announces that he's heard from Lashonna, and regrets to inform the partygoers that business will be keeping her from the day's events, but that she plans on arriving in time for the feast this evening.

Authority Point Award: +1 if at least one PC gifts Zeech something of little material value but gets away with it. –1 if at least one PC lavishes gifts worth over 10,000 gp on him.

Event 8. The Harlequinade Mortificatio

The first true event of the day takes place immediately after the gift giving. Servants appear with padded chairs for each guest and beg them to be seated.

The fool appears again and blows his strange horn. "My masters! We beg you to enjoy our little tale—'tis a small thing I penned myself, a tale of menace, revenge, lust and death which I have called 'The Harlequinade Mortificatio.'" The fool moves back, and as he does, the servants arrange a small stage with a backdrop of a town street at night. A wooden moon wafts over the scene, and suddenly a host of animated skeletons dressed as clowns march on stage.

The play is performed in silence, apart from guests applauding as the skeletal clowns perform particularly ridiculous stunts, such as drinking wine, since the entire cast is composed of actors whose previous performances annoyed Zeech. Each met with an accident, and was subsequently animated as a skeleton by the Ominous Fabler using a *wand of animate dead* and his Use Magic Device skill. The entire play is a curious affair, and it soon becomes obvious that the whole plot recounts how each of the skeletons is acting out its own death, always by suspicious circumstances that aren't quite accidents.

During the play (which lasts for an hour), servants flutter about with wine and trays of lightly roasted almond biscuits of exquisite taste. At the play's end, the curious actors bow and everyone applauds. The Ominous Fabler appears, now dressed as a scarecrow on stilts and with a hare's skull where his head should be. He leads guests across the grounds to the next event, singing a song about boiling sparrows as he goes.

Event 9. The Handsome Slaughter of Curious Avians

Eventually the guests arrive at the Balcony of Expectorance, a wide deck jutting from the cliffside about twenty feet down from the palace. The Balcony is sheltered from the wind and the view of the Redhand coastline is even more magnificent than that from the Vertiginous Terrace.

The fool trundles up onto the balcony railing, somehow managing to balance there on stilts as he addresses the guests. "And now, welcome to the Balcony of Expectorance, my friends, and the Handsome Slaughter of Curious Avians!" Two deformed servants march out, carrying between them a large rack of repeating crossbows. Another group of guests wheel out a number of cages filled with brightly colored red birds. "Please, select your weapon, and make ready to..." Prince Zeech cuts him off

with a dismissive slap as he steps forward. The fool teeters, but manages to catch his balance and clambers down from the ledge as the prince selects a magnificent-looking crossbow and says, "I'm feeling particularly lucky today. If anyone can bring down more than me, I'll give the lucky soul a thousand gold coins."

All of the crossbows are masterwork, with the exception of Zeech's (which is a *+3 repeating light crossbow*). Once everyone has selected their crossbow, the guests take turns as the Fabler releases ten of the brightly colored corollaxes (bright red exotic birds with the ability to generate *color sprays*) into the air. The corollaxes immediately scatter and begin flashing sprays of color as they wheel in the air. Each guest has three rounds to shoot and bring down as many of the corollaxes as he can before the birds escape around the sides of the cliffs. Zeech goes first and manages to take down six; the other guests do their best (or in some cases, deliberately do worse than the Prince), but none beat Zeech. The PCs are free to try to beat Zeech if they wish.

As the shoot progresses, servants pass roasted corollax glazed in honey and mulled spice wine amongst the guests.

Authority Point Award: +1 if the PCs win but manage to mollify Zeech with a DC 25 Diplomacy check. –1 if the PCs win and gloat.

Event 10. Some Lively Sports and Baiting

After the slaughter of the curious avians, the fabler leads the party back into the house, through a maze of doors and halls, and eventually down into the extensive basements. He does so by walking on his hands the entire trip, finally leading the group into one of Zeech's underground miniature arenas. The guests are directed to sit on the curved benches surrounding the sunken fighting pit (which contains two four-foot-square bird cages swathed in dark silks), while the Fabler explains the nature of the event.

The misshapen gnome retrieves a small oak box from a locked chest and opens it, withdrawing a pair of silver rings. "And now, we come to some lively sports and baiting, my friends! These rings are ensorcelled with magic such that those who wear it can direct the actions and movements of one who has been... specially prepared, as a receiver." He hobbles over to the prince and hands one of the rings to him. "The prince would like to challenge one of you to an honest fight, utilizing what lives at the other end of these rings as proxies. Are there any of you brave enough to meet the prince's champion on the field of battle?"

None of the other guests immediately rise to the occasion, giving the PCs the opportunity to challenge Zeech. If none of the PCs wants to take up the challenge, Mariss Quemp eventually accepts the ring and promptly loses to Zeech.

Once a PC puts on the ring, he must make a DC 15 Fortitude save to resist being overwhelmed with the disorienting feeling of seeing, feeling, and hearing through the body of a cockatrice in one of the covered cages in the arena below. The Fabler pulls a silk cord and releases a dozen feral cats into the arena—the cats immediately begin racing in circles, fighting and yowling in anger. The Fabler raises his voice over the rest of the crowd and announces "If you can create more ornaments than the prince, and if you can survive his champion's wrath, you'll win a most fabulous prize indeed!"

With that, he pulls a second cord and the cages in the pit below open, allowing the two cockatrices within to escape into the arena. The fighting pit is thirty feet square, and the object is to control one's cockatrice and petrify more cats than the other cockatrice. Once all of the cats are petrified, the two cockatrices are to fight one another for the win. Allow the character who took the ring to control his cockatrice; he attacks and defends using the monster's statistics. If the PC failed his Fortitude save to resist being overwhelmed, he suffers a –2 penalty on all attack rolls he makes with the cockatrice, and also suffers a –2 penalty to Armor Class.

If the PC wins, his prize is a golden egg of great size (valued at 1,000 gp).

During the fight, dishes of eggs are served—boiled ones of unusual size, eggs scrambled with fine meats, and even a strange cocktail of egg mixed with rum.

Cockatrices (2): hp 27 each; *Monster Manual* 37.

Feral Cats (12): hp 2 each; *Monster Manual* 270.

Authority Point Award: +1 if the PC wins the battle.

Event 11. Bowling the Devious Heads

After the cockatrice fight, the Fabler leads the guests back upstairs and out into a long, narrow garden on the north side of the palace. By this time, twilight has fallen, and the garden has been lit by numerous differently-colored *continual flames* cast inside skulls hanging from delicate silver and golden chains. Here, a curious game has been prepared. A mound of differently colored human skulls has been arranged at one end of the garden, and the Fabler takes pains to ensure the guests are arranged in a semicircle around this mound of skulls.

"And now, my beautiful friends, we come to the final game of the evening. I present to my wondrous prince an unfortunate criminal named Jack," announces the Fabler, as he hands the prince a human skull that has been painted black. "And to the rest of you, I present these delicate treasures!" The Fabler indicates the stack of differently colored skulls. "The prince shall throw Jack to the far end of the garden, and the rest of you shall toss a chap of your own. The thrower who comes the closest to Jack shall be declared the winner!"

Zeech makes his throw, and Jack lands near the far end of the garden, about 50 feet away from the party-goers. Each guest selects one of the colored skulls from the pile and then makes a ranged attack roll to try to come as close to the skull as possible. Each guest takes a shot, along with each of the PCs who wishes to play. Record the results of their ranged attacks—the character who rolls the highest gets closest to Jack (possibly by knocking other skulls out of the way). The distance and the skull's awkward balance work together to impart a –14 penalty on the attack roll. For sake of ease, you can simply roll 1d20

and assume that the resulting number is the final result of each of the guests' attack rolls, but you should make the PCs roll for real.

The winner of this competition receives a necklace with a small silver skull with ruby eyes worth a total of 2,500 gp.

During the sport, servants pass around gingerbread men without heads. The evening grows late as the game ends, and the sun sinks behind the horizon

Authority Points: +1 if one of the PCs wins the competition.

Event 12: Setting the Table

After the bowling of the devious heads comes to a close, the peal of an unseen gong sounds the call for dinner—the feast is ready! The Fabler leads the guests back into the palace and thence to the Great Banqueting Hall.

A massive, cylindrical chamber rises through the heart of Zeech's Palace. A tremendous round table of polished mahogany dominates the room, the walls of which are decked with portraits and landscapes of great quality. A large number of these feature Zeech himself, although the enigmatic Lashonna, a silver-haired, pale, remarkably beautiful woman, dominates one prominently placed portrait near Zeech's place at the table. A vast stained glass dome depicting what appear to be angels at play arches gracefully above, its perimeter decorated by a ring of severed heads mounted on iron spikes some twenty feet above the polished marble floor.

A DC 20 Spot check is enough to discern that the "angels" in the window are, in fact, erinyes devils, and their "play" is anything but something one would normally associate with angels. The mounted heads are no mere mortal decapitates—they have been animated and given the power to speak. All twenty heads cheer and encourage everything Zeech says in strange and sonorous voices powered by magic.

The Fabler bids the guests to be seated. Each setting bears a name on a card and a dazzling array of cutlery, including ten different spoons. A DC 20 Diplomacy check is good enough for a character to know which utensils to use and when to use them. A character that has at least 5 ranks in Knowledge (nobility and royalty) automatically knows which ones to use. A character who doesn't use his utensils properly runs the risk of offending the prince.

You can arrange the seating for the feast as you see fit. The PCs may have earned a place at Zeech's side, or one of the characters may end up having to sit next to a guest that they particularly despise. One chair, the one directly opposite Zeech, remains curiously vacant—at least until a few moments after everyone has seated. At this point, one of Zeech's servants announces the arrival of the final guest.

Event 13: Lashonna's Arrival

As Lashonna enters the Great Banqueting Hall, everyone rises from their seats. The woman is dazzlingly beautiful, with alabaster skin and long silver hair set back with a tiara of black diamonds. Everyone in the rooms feels her gaze settling upon them. Lashonna greets Zeech with a nod

but says nothing, and gracefully takes her seat at the opposite end of the table from the prince.

Lashonna takes part in idle conversations during the feast, but is particularly interested in the PCs. She has been following their progress via reports from her agents since she learned some time ago of their actions against the Ebon Triad during "The Three Faces of Evil," but never risked tipping her hand using more direct methods like *scrying*. She knows that they represent her best chance to destroy Dragotha, and also knows that they represent the greatest threat to the Age of Worms. She tries to mask her interest in the PCs with her Bluff skill, but a Sense Motive check reveals her interest in everything they say or do at the feast. If Prince Zeech notices the attention she's giving the PCs with his own Sense Motive check, he becomes annoyed, but not enough to become offended and order the poisoning of a later course.

If one of the PCs is bold enough to ask Lashonna about Balakarde, the Ebon Triad, or anything else, she rolls her eyes in mock impatience, and then whispers to that character, "I know of your need for knowledge, and I have much to give. We should wait until after this quaint little dinner is over to speak."

First Course: The Feast of Worms

Zeech stands and silence falls upon the banquet hall. "My dear friends," he begins, and as he does, the decapitated heads above echo the word "friends" in a ghoulish tone. "I bid you enjoy this feast, eat and drink your fill in my humble abode." He claps his hands once. An instant later the great doors to the kitchen swing open and a trio of manticores enter to the ghoulish hoorahs of the heads. Yet these are no wild monsters—the fire is gone from their eyes, and their wings have been cruelly severed. Even the once ferocious barbs of their long tails have been surgically removed. Each manticore carries great platters on its back, and a host of distorted servants trail behind them, eager to begin serving food.

Each guest is given a small covered silver goblet—the PCs may notice flickers of disgust and trepidation flashing on the faces of other guests with DC 20 Sense Motive checks. When all have been served, the Fabler stands and tells the guests of a proud Alhaster tradition. One of the founders of Alhaster was a desperate pilgrim who washed up on the harbor shore. He had not eaten for many weeks, and he fell upon the moors to die. As he did he saw a worm emerge from the ground, and he realized the worm was a gift from the gods that he should live—and so he devoured it. In Redhand it has always been the tradition to start a feast with such a celebration of thanks. The Fabler bids that the guests now do the same.

Inside the silver goblet writhes a fat, greasy worm, its glistening flesh a nasty shade of green. A DC 15 Knowledge (nature) check identifies the worm as a relatively harmless green scrubgrub. Characters who have had the chance to examine a Kyuss worm up close can tell immediately that this grub, while similar in appearance, is not one of these vermin. The worm itself is surprisingly tasty, and brings no ill effect once consumed. Failure to eat the worm offends the prince.

After the first course, Prince Zeech commands the Fabler to tell a tale. The Fabler clears his throat, stands upon his chair, and tells an amusing story about a dryad whose tree is unknowingly transplanted into a bitter noble's garden, and of the delightfully ironic fate she devises for the man. When the tale is done, the Fabler bows and takes his seat, at which point the Prince opens the floor to any other guests who may have a tale to tell.

None of the guests do, but if one of the PCs wishes to tell a story they can. Encourage the player to tell the entire story to the group, and at the end of his story, he should make a Perform (oratory) check, opposed by the Fabler's earlier Perform (oratory) check.

Authority Point Award: Each PC who beats the Fabler's Perform (oratory) check gains +1 Authority Points.

Second Course: Four and Twenty Blackbirds

For the second course, a single domesticated manticore enters. It carries an enormous pie on a silver dish of great size strapped to its back. Pastry beaks of birds cover the pie, and as everyone watches, the crust is opened and 24 blackbirds emerge, flying around the room in terror. These blackbirds are a *programmed illusion*, but the birds baked into the pie are not. The blackbird pie has a delicately sugared and almond crust that tastes surprisingly good. As the pie is served, the servants bring in huge tureens of vegetables, along with plentiful supplies of a locally produced spiced white wine called Redhand Resinwint. This wine is particularly potent, and anyone who drinks from it must make a DC 13 Fortitude save to avoid suffering a –2 penalty on all Wisdom-based skill checks for the rest of the evening.

After the second course is complete, Zeech asks the Fabler for a song. The spriggan bows and stands on his chair again (perhaps sneering at any PCs who outdid his story after the First Course) and proceeds to perform a catchy little tune on his pan pipes. And again, after his performance, Zeech asks if anyone else at the table has a song to share. Allow the PCs to make Perform checks if they wish to play or sing a song, opposed by the result of the Fabler's Perform (wind instruments) check. No instruments are available (and the Fabler certainly won't loan out his pan pipes), so if the PCs didn't bring their own instruments they'll be limited to Perform (song) for their check.

Authority Point Award: Each PC who beats the Fabler's Perform (wind instruments) check gains +1 Authority Points.

Third Course: Tojbasarrirge

The Fabler announces the third course as a concoction of the prince's own—delectable tojbasarrirge for all! Tojbasarrirge is a curious dish involving an entire tojanida, stuffed with numerous gritty basilisk steaks, which are in turn stuffed with tangy arrowhawk breasts, which are finally in turn stuffed with

an entire boned stirge with three olives impaled on its proboscis.

The tojbasarrirge is brought out on a huge platter slung between two manticores, upon which rests a great tojanida shell, halved and filled with a descending mass of meat. The prince himself invented this recipe (with aid from his cooks), and unfortunately, the entire thing is foul.

As this course begins, the guests must make Bluff checks to cover up their distaste of the dish, opposed by the prince's Sense Motive. Fortunately, the prince himself realizes that the food is vile, and only a few bites in he suddenly declares the third course complete and commands the servants to immediately clear the table for the fourth. They haul the remnants of the failed dish away, throwing it over the cliff and into the sea.

Authority Point Reward: If a PC manages to choke down a few bites of tojbasarrirge without the prince seeing through his Bluff, that PC gains +1 Authority Point.

Fourth Course: Purple Worm Aspic

As the fourth course begins, huge covered tureens are brought out. Within shudders a strange purple jelly. The Fabler observes that purple worms are a notorious menace in certain areas of the world, and their propensity for eating everything that moves is known to adventurers far and wide. The tribesmen of old learnt of a way of cooking the poisonous tail sections of the purple so that the poison is neutralized, but the recipe has to be precise in its preparation. As the bowls of shuddering purple glop are placed before each of the guests, the Fabler wonders if any of the guests at the table is brave enough to taste the dish before the prince puts his health at risk for deliciousness.

Naturally, none of the other guests volunteer. In fact, all eyes turn to the PCs to see if one of them will take the first taste. If no one tastes the food, Kilraven eventually makes a big deal about testing the dish. The meat is actually quite tasty, and is perfectly safe to eat. It is served with iced C'rosch—a strong local spirit made from blackberries and exotic spices. C'rosch is even more alcoholic than Redhand Resinwint, and characters who partake and fail a DC 16 Fortitude save suffer 1d10 points of Wisdom damage, but gain a +4 alchemical bonus on Charisma-based skill checks for 1 hour.

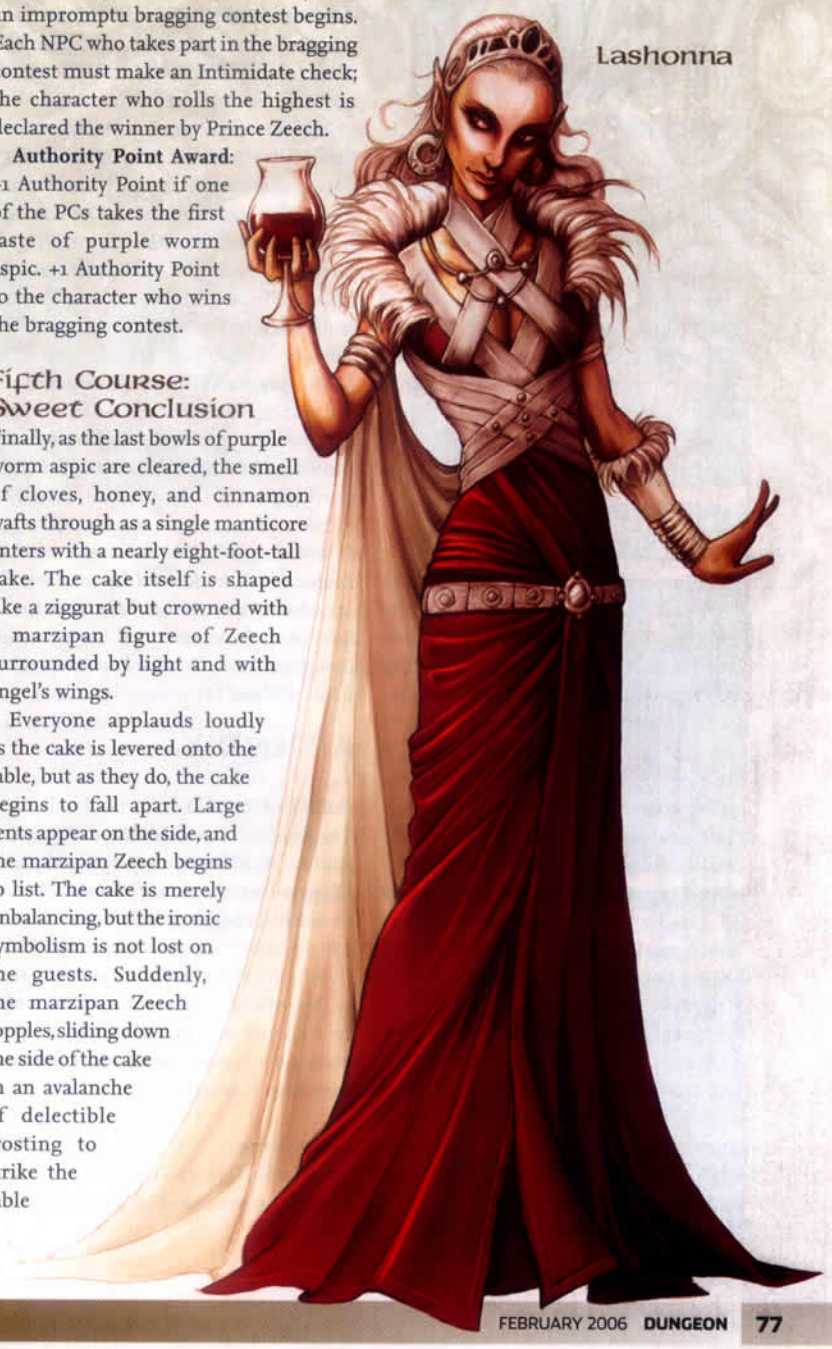
During this course, Kilraven tells stories of how he dispatched dozens of Reyhu orcs on behalf of the prince. Others join in (B'kruss in particular), and an impromptu bragging contest begins. Each NPC who takes part in the bragging contest must make an Intimidate check; the character who rolls the highest is declared the winner by Prince Zeech.

Authority Point Award: +1 Authority Point if one of the PCs takes the first taste of purple worm aspic. +1 Authority Point to the character who wins the bragging contest.

Fifth Course: Sweet Conclusion

Finally, as the last bowls of purple worm aspic are cleared, the smell of cloves, honey, and cinnamon wafts through as a single manticore enters with a nearly eight-foot-tall cake. The cake itself is shaped like a ziggurat but crowned with a marzipan figure of Zeech surrounded by light and with angel's wings.

Everyone applauds loudly as the cake is levered onto the table, but as they do, the cake begins to fall apart. Large rents appear on the side, and the marzipan Zeech begins to list. The cake is merely unbalancing, but the ironic symbolism is not lost on the guests. Suddenly, the marzipan Zeech topples, sliding down the side of the cake in an avalanche of delectible frosting to strike the table hard enough that the head snaps off and rolls across the table to land in someone's lap. If one of the PCs has managed to particularly annoy Zeech, the head should end up in his lap—otherwise it should land on a randomly-determined PC. The irony causes a few stifled chuckles and giggles, but for the most part the guests do an admirable job covering their mirth. Each PC must make a Bluff check



opposed by Zeech's Sense Motive check to hide their reactions.

The hate in Zeech's eyes is palpable, but just before he orders the execution of his entire cooking staff, the Fabler steps in to save the day by making light of the fall, observing that "the cake is not made of stone and iron, and that he'll eat it all if no one else will." The joke goes over well and gives the guests something to laugh at other than the obvious irony, and while everyone of course eats the cake, Zeech does so in brooding silence. Alternately, a PC can save the situation before the Fabler by making a joke of his own with a DC 20 Perform (comedy) check.

Authority Point Award: +1 Authority Point if one of the PCs manages to save the situation before the Fabler resorts to his joke.

Ad-Hoc Experience Award: If the PCs make it all the way to the end of the feast without causing its premature end, award them a story award in experience points as if they had defeated a CR 20 creature in combat. Not all battles in the Age of Worms are won with steel and spell...

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

With the conclusion of the great feast, the Fabler calls for the dance of the dead, the traditional Alhaster close to important ceremonies. Typically, dancers dressed as the dead founding fathers of the city perform the dance, but this time the Fabler commands his skeletal minions to do the duty. As some of the help quickly and efficiently clear the table the Fabler leads the guests into the palace ballroom. He asks for any other characters who displayed talent with musical instruments or song to join him and several other members of the staff as a strange, slightly off-key but nonetheless exuberant song strikes up.

Use this dance to conclude events—partners are switched and changed and the time for plain talking comes under the covering noise of the musicians. Zeech, still angry at the failure of the fifth course, does not take part, and instead watches silently from a throne. This dance can go on as long as you wish—it's the perfect opportunity for the PCs to interact with any of the other NPCs they wish to talk to, although at this point Zeech himself has little interest in chit-chat.

Eventually, Prince Zeech has had enough and leaves in silence—applauded (of course) by his fellow guests as he makes his way to his quarters. The guests are led back to the carriages and taken back to their lodgings.

At some point before the party breaks up, Lashonna agrees to meet the PCs again in a few nights' time—they have piqued her interest with their antics at the feast and she agrees to answer their questions. If the PCs ask her about Balakarde, the Age of Worms, or similar topics she simply nods and warns them, "Save the questions for later. There are too many ears in this place." The interview with Lashonna is detailed in the next adventure, "The Library of Last Resort."

Make sure to keep track of how many Authority Points the PCs earn—these totals will become quite important once the final adventure, "Dawn of a New Age," begins.

"To the dear folk of the DUNGEON *message boards: please let Richard know if you like his adventure, as he has been up a tree at home since he wrote it and has refused to come back down. He must be getting cold by now." —Alison Pett*

APPENDIX

Acidwraith

The foul, toxic liquid bubbles and surges to noxious life, sliding up onto itself and quickly filling out into the form of a lumbering, draconic beast. The thing's body is semi-translucent and gelatinous, and streamers of acid drip from its flanks to sizzle on the ground—some of these strands writhe and crack like whips. Its long neck ends in a disturbing tangle of skulls, some human, some draconic, and some something in between.

ACIDWRAITH **CR 16**

Large undead (incorporeal, water)

Init +14; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +26, Spot +26

Aura corrupting aura (10 ft., DC 26)

Languages Aquan, Common

AC 26, touch 26, flat-footed 16; Dodge, Mobility

hp 143 (22 HD); fast healing 15

Immune acid, electricity, sonic; undead traits

Resist fire 20; **SR** 28

Fort +7, **Ref** +17, **Will** +14

Weakness liquid dependency

Spd fly 60 ft. (perfect)

Melee bite +20 (4d6+10 plus 2d6 acid) and 4 tendrils +15 touch (2d6 acid)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Base Atk +11; **Grp** —

Atk Options Combat Expertise, Spring Attack, Whirlwind Attack

Special Attacks breath weapon

Abilities Str —, Dex 30, Con —, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 25

SQ acidic body

Feats Ability Focus (breath weapon), Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Spring Attack, Whirlwind Attack

Skills Craft (alchemy) +27, Hide +31, Knowledge (arcana) +27, Listen +26, Spot +26, Tumble +35

Environment aquatic

Organization solitary

Treasure standard

Advancement 23–30 HD (Large), 31–66 HD (Huge)

The acidwraith, at this point in time, is a unique undead creature. This creature manifested when the soul of a marid genie merged with a specific combination of acids and magical alchemical fluids associated with dragons are mixed together. In many ways, the genie's ghost has possessed this dangerous combination of chemicals, yet it is not technically a ghost. The creature's head is the only really solid part of its body, a collection of skulls that shift between the draconic and the humanoid. These skulls are real bone manifested by the acidwraith's presence; they constantly reform and rebuild as the thing's acidic body eats them away.

The acidwraith itself is incorporeal, yet much of is body consists of acidic, poisonous fluid. Close inspection reveals that the fluid constantly runs out of its body only to be reabsorbed from sur-

Scaling the Adventure

"The Prince of Redhand" is designed for a group of four 15th-level PCs, but with a little work it can be adapted for use by 13th–14th-level characters or 16th–17th-level characters. For all of the NPCs at Zeech's palace, adjust their skill bonuses by a number equal to the amount by which the party's average level deviates by 15. Don't forget to modify the amount of treasure found in the adventure appropriately. Specific changes to the adventure include:

13th–14th-level PCs: Reduce the Overgod's Hit Dice by 2–4. Remove one of the black dragons from Chapter Three. Make the acidwraith a corporeal undead creature.

16th–17th-level PCs: Advance the hangman golem's Hit Dice by 3–6, and the Overgod's Hit Dice by 2–4. Add 1–2 more black dragons to Chapter Three. Advance the acidwraith's Hit Dice by 3–6.

rounding liquid. An acidwraith deprived of a constant source of liquid quickly grows powerless.

Like all incorporeal creatures, an acidwraith can pass through solid objects. When it does so, its bony skulls and acidic body slough to the floor. As soon as the acidwraith emerges, its acidic body and skulls reform, as long as the creature is in a watery area.

The acidwraith is quite intelligent, and its skill at alchemy is prodigious. Given resources and time, this creature could easily create many more similar manifestations of undead elementals bonded with the acidic leavings of black dragons.

An acidwraith is the size of a large horse. Its liquid body weighs about 1,500 pounds.

Combat

In combat, an acidwraith attacks with a bite from its skulls and up to four whip-like strikes with filaments of acid drawn from its own body. Strikes from its bite deal physical damage, and it uses its Charisma instead of its Strength to modify the damage inflicted. Its whip tendrils deal no physical damage, but all of its attacks inflict acid damage on a successful hit—it's tendril strikes need only make a touch attack do inflict damage as a result.

Acidic Body (Ex): Anyone striking an acidwraith with a natural attack or unarmed strike takes 2d6 points of acid damage. Likewise, any weapon that strikes an acidwraith takes 2d6 points of acid damage each time it hits.

Breath Weapon (Su): Once every 1d4 rounds, an acidwraith can exhale a 30-foot-long cone of burning, noxious vapor. The cloud of vapor is acidic and poisonous. Creatures in the area of effect take 12d6 acid damage (Reflex DC 30 half) and must make a DC 30 Fortitude save to avoid taking 1d6 points of Strength damage. One minute later, these creatures must make a second DC 28 Fortitude save to avoid taking 2d6 points of Strength damage. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

Corrupting Aura (Su): All water within 10 feet of an acidwraith is quickly converted into acid. In a large body of water, this merely surrounds the acidwraith with diluted acid that inflicts 1d6 points of acid damage per round to anything within the area. Creatures with the water subtype who are within 10 feet of an acidwraith take 6d6 acid damage per round as their bodies are eaten away. Magic water (and non-water liquid such as blood and potions) is not affected by an acidwraith's corrupting aura.

Liquid Dependency (Ex): An acidwraith must remain in contact with a body of liquid at least as large as its space. Each round it is not in contact with liquid, it suffers 2d6 points of damage. An acidwraith loses its fast healing when not in contact with a body of liquid.

Alhaster

BY RICHARD PETT,
BY ERIC DESCHAMPS, CHAD DULAC AND UDON STUDIOS WITH HERBERT KWAN AND KEVIN YAN,
BY ROBERT LAZZARETTI,

The rugged northern shore of the Lake of Unknown Depths rises from icy cold waters. Merchant ships once sped between busy ports along the coastline, yet now the domains of the Shield Lands lie in ruins, their people scattered by the fiend-armies of Iuz. Here and there, the skeletons of towns and cities perch atop seaside cliffs or fester along dark rivers, now populated only by those desperate souls lucky enough to escape being captured (or worse) by the horde of orcs and demons that serve Iuz. Meanwhile, the slaves taken by the invading orcs, necromancers, and demons use the ruined cities as staging grounds for shipments of grains and goods back to the Old One.

Far to the east, however, the empty roads and rotting cities finally give way. Here stands a huge settlement—a vast town perched upon a rocky outcropping. The town curls around a natural harbor that shelters numerous ships, from proud sailing vessels to small rickety fishing sloops. Buildings have been crammed onto the rocky promontory with such congestion that they almost seem afraid of the gray, featureless lands beyond—rotting hills of brown and black and gray stones and vast muddy tidal flats pocked with collapsed structures and stunted trees. The town itself is a montage of different architectural styles, designs, and cultures. Black towers rise ominously along the walls and cliffs surrounding the town, while intimidating golden-domed temples and pagodas cast shadows upon huge wood and stone manor houses that reach cathedral height. Interspersed with these are endless rows of hovels made from bits of timber, barrels, sides of boats, and rubbish. The shanties spread at the feet of the town, like flotsam washed up at the seashore.

For many years two structures have dominated Alhaster's skyline. In the center of town rises the ominous Cathedral of Hextor, while on the highest cliffside stands Zeech's Palace. A mongrel display of different styles and tastes, the palace is surrounded by gardens and perches precariously upon the cliffside.

Today, the palace is dwarfed by a new construction. A massive ziggurat of red stone nears completion in the southwest section of town, where numerous villas and buildings have been razed to make room for its prodigious construction.

And above the town circle crows—thousands upon thousands of them—like black storm clouds. The town sprawled below is Alhaster, and it is here that the Age of Worms shall begin.

Alhaster in Brief

Alhaster is a house divided—the rich areas feature stone buildings, some of which are of considerable age. They rub gables with huge timber temples and manors. These streets are regularly patrolled and kept immaculately clean by an army of gray-clad workers (who themselves are not encouraged to talk to visitors). Although Alhaster's patron deity is Hextor, Prince Zeech tolerates other religions here in the interest of commerce, including those who worship Heironeous (provided they show proper deference and don't cause trouble).

In stark contrast to the western third of the town is the true misery of Alhaster, hovels of flotsam and rubbish crammed together in tangled heaps, each using the other hovel for support as much as the soggy ground below. Despite the poor quality of its buildings and miserable state of its citizens, Low Alhaster is in many ways more important to the town's continued prosperity than High Alhaster, for it is here that the corrupt merchants and pirates rule. Alhaster is the only port in the Bandit Kingdoms. Much of the trade that passes through the town would be illegal in more lawful climates, but here, the law is less concerned with morality than it is with maintaining the status-quo. As long as the Bandit Kingdoms in the interior need imported drugs, food, slaves, and weaponry, Alhaster will continue to prosper.

Alhaster (Large Town): Conventional; AL LE; Population 4,700; 3,000 gp limit*; Assets 705,000 gp; Mixed (80% human, 8% half-orc, 4% hobgoblin, 4% halfling, 4% other races).

Authority Figure: Prince Zeech (LE male human paladin 8/blackguard 8).

*Although the standard 3,000 gp limit applies to most locations in Alhaster, the prevalence of smuggling and piracy in the town raises this limit by a fair amount in some locations.

Alhaster's Rulers

Alhaster's current ruler is a fallen paladin styling himself Prince Zeech. His twenty-year rule (the "Days of Joy," as he likes to refer to them) has been a stain on the history of a land already steeped in conflict, wars, and petty lords. Zeech is a tall, thin man with pale skin and long dark hair. He dresses flamboyantly in silks and gowns and has an effeminate air about him. His voice is quiet and considered until his ire is raised, at which point his rage is a match for the worst barbarian's. His cruelty is legendary, and many of his subjects have been executed for nothing more than an inappropriate glance.

Over the twenty years of his rule, Zeech has distanced himself from those who helped him to his throne—allies he never trusted or liked and friends he felt himself far above. Today, Zeech is a tyrant of the worst kind, a despot who believes that he has the greater good at heart. He feels that his rule is just but firm, yet at the same time, he finds it difficult to resist the temptations of decadence and vice. Some part of Zeech's mind realizes Alhaster is drowning in its own sins, but the rest of him revels in his power. His latest project exemplifies his madness. On his orders, a large section of town has been razed. Those who had the misfortune to have homes there have relocated to other locations in the town. A lucky few had some of their costs subsidized by the prince, but most of these displaced citizens were forced to fend for themselves.

In the cleared area, Zeech began construction of the Great Project, an immense ziggurat that he hopes will ensure his entrance to paradise. He first saw this structure in his dreams—a great tower rising into the heart of a storm, but soon these dreams began to come to him while awake. In time, these visions convinced him that he was the son of Hextor, and that his entrance into paradise at Hextor's side depended on the construction of the ziggurat.

Alas, Zeech's visions and dreams are more than mere fancy, they are false whispers from a highly dangerous and manipulative agent of Kyuss named Lashonna. Like Zeech, Lashonna was formally a paragon of virtue, a mighty silver dragon who once fought with a band of hermetic druids based in the Rift Canyon. Lashonna was captured in a key battle by the great dracolich Dragotha and transformed into a vampire. She has since succumbed wholly to her evil nature but still nurtures a terrific hatred for her master, and plots to usurp his role as Kyuss' primary agent in the world. Today, Lashonna serves as the high priest of the Ebon Triad, yet for all her power she still rankles at being ranked below Dragotha in the church of Kyuss. If only there were a way to supplant him...

Lashonna spends most of her time in the form of an astonishingly beautiful elven woman with alabaster skin and long silver hair. She retains a powerful presence about her, and is quiet, calm, and penetrating in conversation. She has a strangely soothing voice and possesses an incredible knowledge of history. At times, this knowledge almost seems to be first hand.

Lashonna has been the true ruler of Redhand for centuries, and has quietly and secretly manipulated a long line of rulers. Zeech is merely the latest nknowing pawn. In Zeech, Lashonna has finally found a minion with the drive to see to the creation of the ziggurat needed to bring Kyuss back from the brink, yet the fallen paladin also possesses something that Lashonna greatly fears: a conscience. It may be suffocated deep below his effete and despotic exterior, yet it remains a weakness that the vampiric dragon hopes to keep suppressed, shackled by ambition and ideology.

For decades, Lashonna has also served as the unseen guiding hand of the Ebon Triad. She is a cruel and manipulative genius intent on calling Kyuss to her so she can become his bride, and in this plan, the Ebon Triad is nothing more than a tool. Her plans and goals are destined to involve the PCs themselves, as will be made clear in the last four installments in the Age of Worms Adventure Path.

Alhaster's Citizens

A strange atmosphere of joy permeates the citizenry of Alhaster for one pervasive reason: the average denizen of this oppressed town is petrified to appear otherwise. They know that the prince's agents are swift to quash any dissent or organized troublemakers. Citizens of Alhaster greet all strangers with forced smiles and greetings such as, "Joy to you this day, stranger!" or "A blessing upon

you for visiting our humble land." You may wish to use this façade in varying degrees—be wary of the fact that some players will find the endless happiness hard to bear and may be tempted to lash out at inappropriate targets. Other players may enjoy being reminded of the despair that eats at Alhaster's heart.

The weather-beaten locals typically dress in cast-off clothing from the upper class sold by scroungers in the marketplace. Facial hair is common among men, whilst the women favor wearing their hair long. A typical commoner in Alhaster lives a hard life, barely makes enough to pay for food and board, and thanks his good fortunes every day he isn't robbed, beaten, or worse. This strange attitude spawns an ironically optimistic outlook.

For entertainment, the commonfolk of Alhaster visit the town's numerous taverns, the Alhaster Arena (area **17**), and Miomay's Playhouse (area **12**). Storytelling is a favorite pastime for those who cannot afford these pursuits. The heroes of the common folk are those who work by stealth or guile, since it's difficult for anyone who grows up in Alhaster to conceive of a direct physical confrontation resulting in anything less than imprisonment or public humiliation at the delicate hands of Zeech's secret police. One famous yarn called the "Wolfskinner's Story" tells the tale of a thief who lost his love to a wolf pack. The thief caught and skinned a wolf and wore its hide to join the pack, and in time he found himself alone on a wild moor with the pack leader, whom he slew. As the pack leader died, it disgorged the bodies of its innocent victims who then rose from death—one of whom was the thief's loveer, and the two lived happily ever after in the moorlands of Redhand.

The commonfolk use wild herbs gathered from the surrounding tidal flats to flavor their meat (they love pork when they can get it, but eel and rockfish are their staples), and use a lot of dumplings in their food as a cheap and efficient way to round out a meal. Most of the taverns brew a thick, herby rum which is mixed with hot water and butter to make a local brew called Grolg (which, if a little salty, is very palatable).

Prince Zeech is fond of throwing festivals, parades, and public displays of his wealth and power. Typically, two similar events occur at the same time. The actual event takes place in High Alhaster and is an invitation-only affair, while the bulk of the populace mirrors the festivities elsewhere, typically in the marketplace or the Alhaster Arena. Crimson and black prayer flags to Hextor cloak the streets during these festivals, fluttering in the wind. Commoners find themselves overcome with love for Zeech and stand crying out their praises to their ruler. Some are so overcome with false joy that they throw themselves off bridges or tall buildings. Others channel their desperation into more productive (but more dangerous) pursuits. Some of these souls risk the wrath of the town guard and the secret police by forming groups of puppeteers or players who act out satirical scenarios on street corners that depict the ruler of an evil empire being eaten alive by his own followers. Others run an underground movement called the Sinchasers, a group of organized radicals who produce a flyer called the *Sinchaser Report* on an irregular basis that reports the true atrocities of Prince Zeech. The Watchers and Blessed Angels do their best to gather and destroy the *Sinchaser Reports* as they surface, but they have never been able to capture all the copies. With each edition, more and more of Alhaster's commonfolk become secret collectors and converts. The Sinchasers are in fact the brainchild of a bard named Miomay, and the flyers themselves are produced in secret chambers below her playhouse (see area **12**).

Decades of war and toil have made the locals into a very capable group of smugglers, liars, and bluffers. Most of the citizens have Skill Focus (Bluff), a talent that serves one well in a town where the truth is rarely seen. The greatest example of this is the public love for Prince Zeech. Compliments to his greatness are common, often used as interjections in conversations. This false pride in their decadent leader is primarily a result of the omnipresent threat of the Blessed Angels (Alhaster's secret police, see area **31**), who are efficient at capturing, tormenting, and publicly executing rabble-rousers and traitors. The proud locals are different in private. Helpful locals tell stories of the slave camps known as the Glories, or of the madness of Prince Zeech and his pointless obsession with the Great Project (which has already cost hundreds of lives). It shouldn't take long for the PCs to realize that the majority of Alhaster's populace is comprised of diligent, proud, and hard-working souls who have been forced into their current state by fear and oppression. Open rebellion is not in the cards just yet (although the locals are proud, they are not armed or particularly brave), but they do help PCs whom they interpret as possible heroes. The adventure "The Prince of Redhand" outlines how the PCs can gain "Authority Points" for their actions in the town. The more Authority Points they gain, the greater their presence in Alhaster can become.

Alhaster Law

Alhaster is a town known to harbor pirates, bandits, thieves, and worse, yet the town itself is remarkably free of blatant crime. The low crime rate is one of the primary benefits that draw so many people to the town, since beyond its walls the rule is survival of the fittest. Of course, this is not to say that Alhaster is wholly without crime—far from it. The criminal element of the town is evident everywhere, with the open selling of slaves, dangerous drugs and magic, and smuggled goods. Yet since these pursuits are regulated and accepted, they can be pursued without the violence that they are associated with in more intolerant regions. Violent crimes still happen in Alhaster (usually at the expense of the poor), but they are quickly hushed up if word of such an event surfaces. It may come as a shock that there isn't a large, organized thieves' guild in Alhaster—such guilds have appeared in the past, but Zeech's agents have grown fairly good at stopping them from growing too large and powerful. In a way, most of the city itself is a massive thieves' guild, with Prince Zeech as guildmaster.

Visitors to Low Alhaster tend toward the rough, crude, and brutal, and they

spawn most of the town's violent crimes. Fortunately for the town's citizens, these crimes are curtailed by the presence of the Watchers (mercenaries who serve as Alhaster's town guard, see area **30**) and the lurking menace of the Blessed Angels. Of course, these two agencies are used just as often by the prince as tools to bully the populace of Alhaster into complacency. Often, the threat of a visit from one of the Blessed Angels is all it takes to convince a desperate man to agree that the new taxes on his business are quite reasonable after all.

Patrols of Watchers are common sights on the town streets. These mercenary guards patrol in groups of four, and are the primary law enforcement in the town. A patrol typically takes 2d6+6 rounds to arrive at the scene of a disturbance once an alarm is raised. The Watchers have no authority to pass judgment, and are expected to haul anyone they arrest to the dungeons under the barracks (area **32**), although those who resist are typically beaten or even killed in the process of resisting arrest.

Blessed Angels are less common, but hardly a day passes without one winging through the skies above the town on some mission. These erinyes are not coy; they do not cloak their true forms in magic. Yet they are also quite ordered and well-behaved. They focus their attentions solely on special cases that the Watchers are not equipped to handle. If the PCs cause any trouble in Alhaster, the Blessed Angels are the ones most likely to respond.

Religion in Alhaster

Before the Shield Lands fell, Alhaster was renowned for its diversity of faith. Cathedrals to Hieroneous, Kord, St. Cuthbert, and Wee Jas formed the center of religion, surrounded by smaller shrines to numerous other deities. After Alhaster's fall and subsequent assimilation into the Bandit Kingdoms, things changed for the worse. Prince Zeech fancied himself the son of Hextor, and at his command the cathedral of Hieroneous was desanctified and transformed into a cathedral of Hextor. He installed a puppet priest on the pulpit, but keeps the actual power of the church relatively low so that he need not worry about competition in the eyes of the Scourge of Battle. On the surface, worship of Hextor seems to be the most prevalent, but in fact, most of the citizens of Alhaster pay him only lip service and either venerate other gods in private or have lost their faith altogether.

The other cathedrals have fallen on hard times as well. The cathedral of Kord is run-down and on the verge of collapse; only the constant work of its dwindling faithful keeps it upright. The church of Hextor tolerates them as a source of buffoonery, yet the hardliners hold out against the day that their numbers will be strong enough to usurp rule of the town. The priesthood of Wee Jas has changed the focus of their venerations from magic to vanity, and earns a tidy profit catering to the needs of the town's nobles. The cathedral of St. Cuthbert is now abandoned, and is known only as the Church of Blessed Deliverance; his worshipers are few in town today, although one of them, a half-mad woman named Furpotia, still openly practices her faith out of a hovel known as Sinner's Sanctum (area **10**).

Visitors who worship deities other than Hextor are generally not harassed by the Watchers, as long as they keep their worship quiet and out of the public eye. Those who attempt to spread their faith in public areas are quickly arrested and locked away in the dungeons below the garrison. Followers of Hieroneous are particularly despised by many of those in power, and those who display their faith can expect to be harassed by patrols of Watchers at every turn. As long as a visiting Hieroneoan resists the urge to crusade against the town guard and the church of Hextor, though, openly displaying his faith is not quite a great enough offense for arrest.

Alhaster Map Key

Alhaster can be roughly separated into two key districts: High Alhaster and Low Alhaster. Low Alhaster comprises the bulk of the town, and includes areas **1–18**. High Alhaster consists of the western third of the town and encompasses areas **19–39**. Areas **35–39**, the Shanties,

Redhand

Alhaster is the capital of the Bandit Kingdom province of Redhand. While the Age of Worms Adventure Path has little to do with other locations in Redhand, you can use these brief notes to expand your game if the PCs seek adventure beyond Alhaster's walls.

Redhand has been poisoned by battle and famine and bloodshed—gifts from years of warfare and betrayal. The endless cycle of hate has bled the province of its precious resources. The plains are now mostly infertile, rocky places filled with briars and the skeletons of ruined dreams and hopeless toil. Beneath the wearied land can be seen shadows of a dead kingdom—lines of once-fine roads, ruins of sprawling manors, outlines of mighty fortresses, all waiting for someone to breathe life into them again.

One primary road passes through Redhand, a remarkably well-maintained track that serves as an artery for trade between the port and the cities of the interior. Along this road, known locally as the Toilway, are located numerous villages known collectively as the Glories.

Little more than slave camps, each of the Glories has around 500 slave workers watched by a tribe of 50 hobgoblins. The Glories are timber stockades surrounding crude sod-thatched longhouses within which the slaves toil, and despite the terrible cruelty inflicted on them, they remain indomitable. Each camp either contains a quarry, or manufactures a crude sort of cement. Creating the substance requires huge kilns with grinding mills powered by human treadmills.

Day and night, numerous wagons drawn by ill-tempered oxen deliver stone from the Glories to Alhaster to ensure that the Great Project is completed on time. The wagons are occasionally attacked by tribes of orcs, common in the wilder northern section of Redhand. The neighboring bandit kingdom of Reyhu is filled to bursting with orcs—and they could become a serious problem for the future of Redhand.

and Eel Town lie outside of the town walls, but are still considered to be part of the town itself.

Southeast of the town sits an expansive tidal flat on which rows and rows of ramshackle houses have been built. This region is known as the Shanties. The roads that wind through this region are poorly-cobbled pathways that run along the tops of low ridges; during high tide, the areas between these roads (and under the buildings themselves, which rest on soggy wooden pilings) become churning tide pools. On the highest tides or during storms, the roads themselves are often submerged, and many of the lesser buildings wash away only to be replaced in the following months by new hovels. Those who dwell in the Shanties are the lowest of the low in Alhaster—neither the Watchers or the Blessed Angels pay much attention to this forgotten slum, making it an excellent place for PCs on the run from the law to hide out.

A second region outside of Alhaster's city walls resides to the north: Eel Town, a small collection of shops, fishermen's hovels, and shipyards. It is here that the majority of Alhaster's shipbuilding occurs.

Statues of Prince Zeech typify all parts of the town. There are hundreds of them—Zeech shielding his eyes as he looks heroically to the east, Zeech astride a black charger killing a dragon with a lance, Zeech held aloft by an army of grateful workers—the poses are different for each statue, and each is kept in immaculate shape. Even the thousands of crows that infest the city seem to understand this and avoid the statues.

Finally, the cliffs below Alhaster are riddled with sea caves. Some of these caves wind up far enough to connect to the city's crude sewer system, forming a handy highway for the town's healthy smuggling ring.

The following short descriptions cover key locations found on the Alhaster poster map provided with this issue of DUNGEON. Note that most buildings do not have numbers, and can easily stand in for any locations not listed in this Backdrop.

1. Watchtowers

The six watchtowers that surround Alhaster once served an important defense against pirates and bandits. Since Alhaster's fall, these one-time enemies have become many of the town's inhabitants and visitors. As a result, the watch towers have fallen into disrepair. Their ruined interiors are dangerously run-down, and are favorite places for vagabonds and squatters to take shelter.

Prince Zeech

2. Alhaster Market

This large marketplace throngs with activity from sunrise to well after sundown, as merchants, slavers, smugglers, thieves, prostitutes, pirates, and mercenaries gather. The market is also where most of Alhaster's citizens go to buy food, and many of them make meager livings as porters or shoppers for the nobles in town. Patrols of Watchers are constantly on the move through this waterfront market, and it's not unknown to see one of the Blessed Angels swoop down to confront individuals they suspect of fostering discontent.

Characters who visit the market between sunrise and midnight can find anything costing less than 3,000 gp for sale, usually at prices 10% lower than those listed in the core books as merchants cut their prices to compete with nearby stalls. Certain items that are illegal elsewhere (such as poison, drugs, and slaves) are more readily available here—the limit on such items is 6,000 gp. Characters seeking something more expensive can ask around among the dozens of black market agents who skulk in the marketplace—a DC 30 Gather Information check arranges a meeting with someone who can provide what the character is looking for. Items with a value of up to 100,000 gp can be purchased in this manner, although it takes 2d4 days for such items to arrive, since they must be imported from the Free City. For an additional 1,000 gp, the importer can use *teleport* spells to cut the delivery time down to 2d4 hours.

3. Angry Rifter Tavern

The Angry Rifter Tavern is the establishment of choice for visitors to Alhaster. The tavern's location near the main gate to the city ensures that it's one of the first places visitors stumble across, and since most of them are thirsty by the time they get to town, the Angry Rifter does a brisk business. The sign out front shows an enraged bandit rappelling down the side of the building's facade with a rope. Those who enter the loud, rambunctious tavern quickly recognize the bartender as the same man—this is **Telgrith Vanerath** (CN male human fighter 3/rogue 3), a retired bandit who

made enough of a fortune in the Rift Canyon to the north to set up this tavern. Telgrith's aware of the fact that most of the locals avoid his establishment, but the business he does with visitors means he doesn't really care if Alhaster accepts him or not.

4. The Curious Owlbear

The smell surrounding this large butcher shop reveals its function far better than the sign hanging out front (which depicts an owlbear leaning through a hole in a wall to look out the other side, ignorant of the fact that above the hole hangs a guillotine blade). The thing that sets the Curious Owlbear apart from other butchers is the fact that its proprietor, an obese and disturbingly cheerful halfling named **Chosk Underpate** (LE male halfling expert 6), specializes in exotic meats. His offerings constantly change—one day he might have bulette steaks for sale, and the next he might be offering naga sausage or minotaur ribs. The locals still tell tales of the zombie banquet he orchestrated for Prince Zeech—a banquet in which three zombie centaurs served meat cut from their own delicately-seasoned bodies. Chosk takes requests for exotic meat, but usually requires several weeks to fill orders. A sign near his counter announces that he is constantly seeking new meat to purchase. Local adventurers occasionally provide him with cuts of meat butchered from monsters they've slain. Chosk only buys fresh meat (most adventurers use *gentle repose* spells to preserve their wares), and his prices vary wildly. For most common monsters, he pays only 50 gp, but for truly exotic creatures he's been known to pay 500 gp or more for a sample. Rumors that Chosk is a cannibal are rife in town. Chosk denies these rumors loudly, pointing out proudly that he's never tasted *halfling* flesh.

5. Ilsan's Fine Goods

Alhaster has few general goods stores, as most of the wares one might buy at such an establishment can typically be purchased in the Marketplace. This store, owned by **Ilsan Grekalan** (N male human expert 4) is the exception. Ilsan opened this store 30 years ago, before Alhaster joined the Bandit Kingdoms. The combination of his political ambivalence and the need for an established store in the early days of Zeech's rule resulted in this building being one of the few that was spared during the razing of Alhaster in those violent days.

6. Red Blades Merchant Consortium

The Red Blades were founded 18 years ago by a group of mercenaries who had grown tired of the danger and discomfort of the mercenary lifestyle. Originally intended to serve as a place for Alhaster's merchants to meet on common ground, the Consortium succumbed early to graft and corruption. Now, its members are made up of those who can either afford to pay the outrageous entrance fees or are already allied with current members. Those kept from joining find it difficult, if not impossible, to make a living in Alhaster as a merchant.

Recently, control of the Red Blades has been dominated by an elderly woman named Mahuudril. No one seems to know where she came from (she's certainly not a local), but her fabulous wealth combined with the fact that she seems to have blackmail material for half of Alhaster made her rise to power in the Consortium a swift and decisive process. She treats the Consortium and its resources as her personal funds, and as the other members come to realize that they've been regulated to little more than glorified house-servants, discontent has begun to spread.

In fact, **Mahuudril** (CE female avolakia sorcerer 14) is a wormlike monster known as an avolakia. Her kin dwell in the Wormcrawl Fissure, where they worship Kyuss and prepare for the Age of Worms—Mahuudril serves as a secret "ambassador" for the avolakia in Alhaster, and is one of the few denizens of the town that knows the truth about Lashonna's goals. Mahuudril plays a small role in "Prince of Redhand," but the PCs won't directly confront her until part eleven: "Into the Wormcrawl Fissure."

7. Alhaster Shipping Concern

Once the center of import and export activity in Alhaster, this building's name remains only at the idle, ironic whim of its new occupants. The Alhaster Shipping Concern is now a rough, rowdy, and dangerous tavern frequented by pirates, bandits, and other traveling thugs. The building is run by one of the regional pirate captains, nominated by popular vote. Once nominated, a captain serves as the proprietor (and is responsible for keeping the place well-stocked with booze and prostitutes) for a year before a new captain is chosen. The current proprietor is a grizzled hobgoblin with a missing nose and perpetually rotten teeth—this is the notorious pirate **Mudmouth** (NE male hobgoblin fighter 5/rogue 5).

The clientele of the Alhaster Shipping Concern is closely knit, and they don't take well to visitors. Anyone who wants to drink or carouse here must make a DC 30 Intimidate check to impress the locals, otherwise Mudmouth secretly laces their drinks with oil of taggit (Fort DC 15, o/unconsciousness). Anyone who is knocked out by the drink is robbed blind and thrown into the harbor.

8. Tipsy Nymph Brewery

This is the only tavern in Alhaster that doesn't rely on imported or stolen alcohol. It was founded a few years ago by an enterprising bandit named **Kragen Vachus** (LE male human fighter 6/expert 3). Kragen has perfected a method of distilling a quite flavorful ale from the spores of several mushrooms he grows in the basement of the brewery. The ale itself is deep purple and has a rich, earthy taste. Kragen keeps the source of his recipe secret, not only because he fears competition but because he stole the original recipe from a drow outpost back in his adventuring youth, and he'd rather not worry about dark elves coming after him.

9. Crafters' Guildhall

Unlike many towns where the various guilds each operate a separate guildhall, Alhaster sports a single large structure that serves as a shared guildhall for numerous small but necessary

guilds. Bakers, smiths, cobblers, scriveners, carpenters, and more crowd into this rickety building, where they constantly bicker and fight over space and accommodations. None of them have the political clout or physical presence to gain an edge over their fellows or the bandits who run the town, so for now, the sorry state of Alhaster's crafters seems destined to persist.

10. Sinner's Sanctum

This crumbling hovel looks no different than any of the other rotting homes of Alhaster's truly desperate and poor. On the inside, the place's nature is obvious—it is a sickhouse for the poor. Numerous rickety beds and cots line the walls of the building's single room, and a bed and desk in one corner are used by the sickhouse's tender, an aged and half-mad woman named **Furpotia** (LN female human expert 2). The majority of Alhaster believes Sinner's Sanctum to be a leper house, and they avoid the place and the surrounding streets.

This reputation also serves the agenda of the Ebon Triad, which maintains a secret shrine to the Overgod in a small complex below the Sanctum. Furpotia doesn't know about this hidden shrine, and assumes the noises she used to hear coming up from below were manifestations of her madness. Sinner's Sanctum and the Ebon Triad shrine below are detailed further in "The Prince of Redhand."

11. Laughing Dawn Tavern

This tavern is little more than a shed with a low bar rigged against one wall. **Damsk** (LN male human fighter 2/expert 3) is a fat, bald-headed man of considerable size who quietly hums old songs to himself as he tends his bar. Up until a year ago, Damsk was one of Alhaster's most gifted executioners. Many locals believe that when he retired to buy this old building and convert it into a tavern, he did so because he had lost his nerve for executions. In truth, Damsk discovered that several of the prisoners he was executing at Zeech's command were innocent, and rather than face execution himself by openly opposing Zeech, he quietly resigned from his post.

The Laughing Dawn Tavern (named after Damsk's now-deceased wife) may not be much to look at, but it's always well stocked. Its proximity to Miomay's Playhouse ensures that it always receives plenty of business after a show. It is perhaps the favorite tavern for the majority of Alhaster's commonfolk.

12. Miomay's Playhouse

Owned and operated by a beautiful woman named **Miomay** (CN female half-elf bard 7), this playhouse represents one of the few places the commonfolk of Alhaster can go for public spectacle and entertainment (the other similar outlet is the Alhaster Arena). Rebuilt from an even-more grandiose opera house that burned to the ground during Alhaster's succession from the Shield Lands 20 years ago, this playhouse isn't quite as grand and impressive. It has, however, managed to find equilibrium between common vulgarity and high-class sophistication. The plays performed here allow the common folk to feel as if they are nobles, while at the same time give the nobility a chance to experience the seedier side of life. Of course, seating for the two elements remains segregated, with the cheap seats (costing 1 cp per performance) being little more than rocks arrayed on the open dirt floor, and the balcony seats (costing 10 gp per performance) are shaded from the sun and filled with comfortable chairs and feature delicious refreshments.

The playhouse serves two additional functions that are somewhat hidden from most casual visitors. First, most of the actors and actresses Miomay employs staff a semi-secret, invitation-only brothel. Miomay and her employees use the contacts they make amongst Alhaster's nobility primarily to pad their incomes, but also to glean inspiration for future plays.

The second purpose is even more obscure. Only Miomay and her five senior employees know that a semi-regular anti-establishment newsletter called the *Sinchaser Report* is produced in a series of secret rooms below the Playhouse basement.

13. The Ogre's Hideout

There are several inns scattered throughout Alhaster—the Ogre's Hideout is a typical example. Like the other inns, the Ogre's Hideout caters mostly to visiting bandits, pirates, and adventurers; the place has a rough and dangerous feel to it and sports a well-stocked but largely unimaginative taproom and bar on the first floor. The Ogre's Hideout is noteworthy as it is the favored inn for several hobgoblin mercenaries currently visiting Alhaster. These hobgoblins plan to take part in the coming festivities to celebrate Zeech's 20th year of rule. The leader of this band (detailed in "The Prince of Redhand") rented out all of the rooms on the topmost floor, and his all-night antics have been keeping the other patrons up at night. The innkeeper, a jumpy man named **Frill Beskered** (LN male human expert 3), is too cowardly to do anything about it.

14. Gallows

Law in Alhaster is tough, and trials are short, brutal, and corrupt. Those with money or social contacts can generally escape punishment even if they're caught with blood on their hands, but the best others can hope for is a clean death on Alhaster's public gallows. Despite their name, this array of open-air platforms caters to more methods of execution than hanging. A headsman's block, numerous pillories and stocks, and an array of crucifixion crosses loom malignantly at the edge of the marketplace in addition to a large gallows. The method of execution depends as much on the nature of the crime as it does on Zeech's whim, but when they occur, they are always well-attended public spectacles.

15. Gulg's Tinctures

Resem Gulg (NE male human rogue 4) is an aging, partially blind man who has lived in Alhaster all his life. He found the change of rulership twenty years ago to be much to his liking, as now he can sell his beloved poisons without

fear of punishment (as long as he keeps up on his monthly payments to Zeech). His shop is a mass of colorful jars, mounds of carefully mixed spices and herbs, mummified animal corpses, and alchemical apparatus. All of the poisons listed in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* can be purchased here (including those in excess of 3,000 gp per dose)—Gulg typically has 2d10 doses of a particular poison for sale at any one time. If he finds a particular customer to be particularly offensive or annoying, Gulg is not above selling his poisons in defective vials that double the chance of accidental poisoning during use.

16. The Scattergut

This rowdy tavern, owned and operated by an ex-gladiator named **Raktus** (LE male hobgoblin fighter 6), is a favorite of mercenaries and ex-soldiers who have turned to the Alhaster Arena as a source of income. The tavern is always full of loud and thirsty customers after a fight in the arena.

17. Alhaster Arena

The design of the Alhaster Arena may bring to mind the Free City Arena, yet this battleground is smaller in size and scale. The director of the arena is one of Zeech's own ex-commanders, a one-eyed orc named **Mandubulis** (NE male orc barbarian 4/ranger 3/fighter 4) Zeech recruited from the Reyhu tribes of the north. While Mandubulis has little aptitude for social grace, he certainly knows how to set up exciting fights in the arena, and the weekly bouts always draw crowds in excess of a thousand souls, filling the arena to capacity. Characters who fall victim to Alhaster's laws may well find themselves fighting for their freedom here.

18. Hoff's Solutions

Mercenary companies are common in Alhaster. A mercenary band typically consists of up to a dozen grizzled ex-soldiers or bandits who follow the lead of a veteran. Few have headquarters, and when they are not in the field they spend their time scattered among various inns and brothels in town. One of the few exceptions is this squat, ugly wooden building. **Hoff** (NE male dwarf fighter 11) is a foul-mannered and slightly insane retired bandit who has managed to gather together no fewer than 14 different mercenary bands. Leaders of these bands are allowed to stay in this barracks, and anyone who wishes to hire a band can do so by speaking to Hoff's assistant in the front room, a horribly scarred gnome named **Scabface** (LE male gnome rogue 2). Hoff has made a sizable amount of money off his business, and given a few more years could even achieve his goal of being indoctrinated into Alhaster's nobility.

19. Free Lords' Embassy

The Bandit Kingdoms are loosely run by a council of men and women known as the Combination of Free Lords. In Alhaster, Prince Zeech is the only member of this council, although this building is set aside as a place for visiting Free Lords to bunk, meet, or relax. At this time, the only resident of the Embassy is **Miszen Mitchwillow** (NE female halfling sorcerer 15), a woman who has a small role to play in "The Prince of Redhand."

20. Iomandi's Wonders

This stone building is built almost like a bunker. It has no windows, a single iron door, and a small guardpost atop it that is always manned by a bribed Watcher or two. The building's cramped interior is a cluttered and poorly lit curio shop that also serves as Alhaster's most well-stocked magic shop. The proprietor is a perpetually angry woman named **Iomandi** (LE female human wizard 11/expert 2) who retired from the adventuring life when she realized it was safer to buy and sell magic items and jewelry. Her store is heavily warded against theft, to the point that most of Alhaster's thieves have come to view the place as not worth the risk. Much of Iomandi's wares have been reworked by her own considerable skill to be more fashionable or gaudy. Magic items worth as much as 6,000 gp can be purchased here, but the prices are 10% higher than normal.

21. The Deluxury

This impressive stone and wood building is the most prestigious inn, gambling house, and brothel in all of Alhaster, and is said to be one of the few establishments that Prince Zeech himself visits. The staff of the Deluxury includes exotic performers from as far south as the Scarlet Brotherhood and as far west as Ket. The place is enforced by a band of mute but constantly looming hobgoblin eunuchs (male hobgoblin fighter 6), staffed by a number of attractive men and women (human and half-elf expert 4) and owned and administrated by a jolly-looking man named **Armhin Loratio** (NE male human rogue 4/sorcerer 6/arcane trickster 2) who always seems to have the best intentions of his paying customers at heart. Those who know him well know the truth—he's a greedy sadist who treats his customers well only as long as they have money.

Armhin has owned and operated the Deluxury for as long as Zeech has been in power. In fact, it was a generous grant from Zeech (who wanted a "home away from home") that got the place up and running. Armhin's goal with the Deluxury was to create a "heaven on earth" where the rich could come and gamble, drink, eat, and enjoy more carnal pursuits in an environment that asked no questions and told no tales. A typical meal in the Deluxury runs at 50 gp; a night's stay (meal and companionship included) can cost anywhere between 100 gp and 1,000 gp. The establishment offers places to gamble, bathe, receive massages, and otherwise escape the town of Alhaster for as long as the coin purse can bear.

Characters who remember the Emporium from Diamond Lake will see many parallels between the two businesses, although the Deluxury is, all around, a much higher-class establishment. The place also holds two recent arrivals in Alhaster—refugees from the recent dragon attack on Diamond Lake. These are **Professor Montague Marat** (N male human aristocrat 9) and **Shag Solomon** (N male quaggoth aristocrat 6). Other important guests include a mercenary captain named **Vulras** (CG male human ranger 9/rogue 7) and visiting gnome noble **Toris** (NG male gnome aristocrat

11). All four of these NPCs are detailed more fully in "Prince of Redhand."

22. Church of Kord

Once one of the proudest cathedrals in Alhaster, the church of Kord has fallen on hard times. Its few remaining priests have had their pride squashed by two decades of living under Zeech's rule, and spend most of their time repairing their own church, which is slowly falling into ruin. The high priest is an aging warrior named **Lanthis Chax** (CG male human cleric 6/fighter 2), whose only hope is to live long enough to see Zeech overthrown. There are only four 2nd-level clerics under Lanthis, and if they realize that the PCs may be potential allies (by having their initial attitude of indifferent shifted to helpful), they throw caution to the wind and offer their church as a place for the PCs to stay, covering up their presence if necessary. The priests won't charge for spells cast in this case.

23. Church of Blessed Deliverance

Whereas the church of Kord is in bad shape, the church of St. Cuthbert in Alhaster is dead. Partially burned during the town's secession 20 years ago, Zeech decreed that the half-standing ruin be left alone as a testament to his victory. Today, the church is a blackened hulk, a monument to loss and ruin. Melted stained glass depictions of angels, spared from vandalism only by Zeech's decree, appear to writhe in the black kiss of fire in those few walls that still stand.

The only visitors to this place now are the few secret worshipers of St. Cuthbert who still dwell in town. They sometimes come to the place to offer up hidden, desperate prayers. The one remaining living Cuthbertine from the days before Zeech is Furpotia (area **10**), but a second member of the order still "exists" as well, the lunatic gravetouched ghoul **Rhorsk** (CE male gravetouched ghoul cleric 7), once a worshiper of St. Cuthbert but now a devotee of his own unholy hunger. Rhorsk dwells in the partially collapsed cellar below, and his simperings and scratchings have singlehandedly given rise to rumors that the church is haunted. Rhorsk plays a key part in "The Prince of Redhand."

24. Cathedral of Hextor

The largest church in Alhaster is the Cathedral of Hextor. This towering structure was originally a cathedral dedicated to Hieroneous, but now it serves as the official religious focus of the city. Tended by a spineless sycophant named **Vierias Spatlepate** (LE male human cleric 7) and a legion of 1st- and 2nd-level clerics, Prince Zeech has seen to it that the church itself is little more than a shell of what it could become. Zeech sees himself as the chosen tool of Hextor in Alhaster, and brooks no competition in this venue. The church itself is open to the public, and Zeech has decreed that even obvious worshipers of good deities (including worshipers of Hieroneous) are to be admitted within as a show of his power and conviction of his absolute mastery over the rule of the town. Vierias has had all of his opposition to these nearly heretical beliefs beaten from him, and his simpering haste to please all who visit the cathedral should surprise visitors who have come to view the faithful of Hextor as strong-willed. Small groups of devout followers of Hextor have tried in the past to overthrow Zeech and remove this mockery of their faith, but to date, none of them have even come close to success. These failures have, ironically, further validated Zeech's presence and actions in the eyes of many other worshipers of Hextor.

25. The Scarlet Spire

This majestic temple dedicated to Wee Jas has changed the least of the Alhaster churches under Zeech's rule. The place continues to oversee the caretaking duties of the Alhaster Boneyard (area **29**), and its priests, for the most part, have been left free to continue their worship as they see fit as long as they don't disrupt Zeech's rule. The clergy has actually managed to turn the situation to their advantage, and their priests have specialized in the area of vanity and beauty keeping. Their services are for sale to the rich of Alhaster, and most of the town's nobles visit the Spire weekly for regular beauty treatments or to have new outfits and accessories made and fitted. The high priest of the spire is **Almerah Kosen** (LE female human aristocrat 3/cleric 10), a shrill, aging woman who is impossible to please and at once both hated and admired by her dozens of acolytes.

26. Quemp Manor

Of Alhaster's nobles, **Mariss Quemp** (CN male half-orc barbarian 4/fighter 8) is perhaps the most unusual. A "reformed" barbarian who played a key role in the secession of Alhaster, Zeech awarded Quemp his own manor in the most prestigious reach of the city. Mariss Quemp has found that city life agrees with him quite well, and has delegated command of his barbaric mercenaries to a handful of brutal underlings who patrol the lands east of the city. Quemp Manor is the smallest of the three major estates, but Quemp makes do with his holdings and has transformed the palace into a celebration of violence. Statues of grizzled warriors, paintings of battlefields, and servants dressed as barbarians set the tone for this place, which features its own miniature arena in the center of the structure where Quemp arranges private battles for his amusement.

27. Kilraven Manor

Lord Malaven Kilraven (LN male human aristocrat 5/fighter 8) is the captain of the West Border Watch, an honorable man who has served Prince Zeech for the past 19 years after his father died of the Red Death. Kilraven's opinion of Zeech has soured over the years; he has come to think of the man as little more than a petty tyrant more interested in his own decadence than the good of the province, but as long as Zeech is in power, Kilraven intends to remain loyal to him and do what he can to better the living conditions of the citizens by tempering his lord's whimsy with advice. It's a loosing battle, unfortunately, and Kilraven has begun to despair that Alhaster will collapse under Zeech's rule before it can be saved.

28. Mistwall Manor

The largest estate (not counting Zeech's palace itself) in Alhaster is the mysterious and imposing Mistwall Manor.

This magnificent estate survived the fall of Alhaster partially due to luck, but mostly due to the intervention of an enigmatic and beautiful woman named Lashonna. In truth a very old vampiric silver dragon, Lashonna has been a key architect in the current condition of the town of Alhaster, and her advice to Zeech (who values her as a trusted friend and adviser, but to his undying frustration never anything more than that) is the primary cause of the city's current troubles. Lashonna is in fact one of Kyuss' greatest minions, second only to Dragotha, and she has worked for the last 20 years to ensure that everything in Alhaster is ready to usher in the Wormgod's return. Lashonna is one of the primary villains in the last four installments of the Age of Worms Adventure Path.

29. Alhaster Boneyard

The disposal of Alhaster's dead is the sole province and responsibility of the clerics of the Scarlet Spire. The church recruits the citizens of Alhaster itself to help in this regard, and pays a cadaver fee of 5 sp (a fee high enough to make the trip worth it for most of the town's citizens but not quite high enough to encourage murder) to anyone who brings a body to the Spire for disposal. Most of these bodies are cremated, but those who are survived by family or friends rich enough to afford a plot in the boneyard are buried here in sanctified grounds that the acolytes patrol regularly. Rumors that the boneyard is haunted persist, but in fact the place is, ironically, one of the safest in the city due to the diligence of these clerical patrols.

30. Watcher's Compound

This fortified complex serves as a training facility for Alhaster's city guards: the Watchers, composed primarily of humans and hobgoblins. The training procedure to become a Watcher is as intense as it is violent—fully 30% of those who enter these gates for the year-long program die at some point. Those who survive emerge as 6th-level fighters and can look forward to a life of accepting bribe money and bullying the weak, a reward that, for most hobgoblins and mercenaries, is well worth the risks of training. As long as training for a new group of Watchers is in session (as it is right now), the compound remains closed and all contact with Alhaster is cut off, save for the directors and drill sergeants. The current compound director is a soft-spoken hobgoblin named **Jegreshis** (LE male hobgoblin fighter 12), a quiet killer who speaks to new recruits only if he intends to kill them himself.

31. Angel's Aerie

Perched atop a jagged cliffside overlooking the entrance to Alhaster Harbor is this grim, gothic, many-towered structure of dark stone. This is the headquarters for the true police force in Alhaster—the Blessed Angels. Also known as the Black Nuns of Hextor (or even the Brides of Hextor), these twelve erinyes serve many roles in the policing of Alhaster. Where the Watchers themselves handle the day-to-day law enforcement, the Blessed Angels handle the high-profile crimes, mediate important matters between powerful visitors, or serve Zeech himself as personal guards or assassins. Their goals and purposes are usually secret, known only to themselves and Zeech, and there are rumors that even Zeech himself isn't privy to all of their plans.

The erinyes are open about their appearance, and are frequently seen around town or soaring in the skies above. Their constant presence does more for keeping the law than perhaps anything else. The locals are absolutely petrified of them. Rumors abound of families who have dared to insult the prince unmasked by Angels in the guise of loved ones, or couples whispering to each other only to be overheard and unmasked by invisible angels. The locals have a saying: "speak falsely, my friend." In other words, "listen to the opposite of that you hear," since friends often use this method to communicate freely. To most of Alhaster's citizens, the Blessed Angels are viewed as saviors—they keep watch on the town and prevent outside influences from perverting the true path of the prince. What isn't known is how Zeech managed to secure the loyalty of the dangerous devils, exactly how many Blessed Angels dwell in the Aerie, or what serves as their immediate commander. One pervasive rumor holds that it is the Blessed Angels who actually run Alhaster, and that Zeech, the nobility, and the Watchers are all nothing more than charmed pawns.

The truth is actually quite simple. Zeech knew soon after he became the ruler of Alhaster that he needed a potent and mysterious force to not only handle the real problems in the town, but to keep the dissidents and criminal element too scared to try anything really disruptive. It was Lashona who recommended using erinyes, and in truth, it is to her that the Blessed Angels owe their allegiance. For now, however, they are content to follow Zeech's orders.

The PCs are likely to run afoul of some of the Blessed Angels if they are involved in crimes in Alhaster or are suspected of attempting to undermine Prince Zeech's authority. The Blessed Angels are not foolish; they do not confront their targets alone. Rather, they watch from afar, learning of weaknesses and habits they can exploit. When they move to strike, the angels do so in a group of four—this is an EL 16 encounter, but if the Blessed Angels have a chance to tailor their tactics against the PCs, it can be particularly devastating.

Blessed Angel **CR 12**

Female erinyes mortal hunter 4
LE Medium outsider (baatezu, evil, extraplanar, lawful)
Monster Manual 54, *Complete Divine* 50
Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness, true seeing; Listen +17, Spot +17
Languages Common, Celestial, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

AC 28, touch 16, flat-footed 22; Dodge, Mobility
hp 153 (13 HD); **DR** 5/good
Immune fire, poison
Resist acid 10, cold 10; **SR** 20
Fort +19, **Ref** +15, **Will** +12

Spd 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (good)
Melee mwk longsword +20/+15/+10 (1d8+6/19–20)
Ranged *+1 distance light crossbow* +20/+15/+10 (1d8+1/17–20)
Base Atk +13; **Grp** +19
Atk Options mortal hunting +2, smite mortals 1/day (+3 to melee attack, +8 damage)

Mortalbane

The creature can make a spell-like ability particularly deadly to mortals.

Benefit: A mortalbane ability is a damaging spell-like ability that deals 2d6 points of additional damage when used against living nonoutsiders, but only half damage against outsiders, undead, and constructs. Mortalbane can be applied to each of a creature's spell-like abilities five times per day, though the feat does not allow the creature to exceed its normal usage limit for any ability.

This feat originally appeared in the *Book of Vile Darkness*.

Special Atk entangle, *summon baatezu*
Combat Gear *potions of cure serious wounds* (2)
Mortal Hunter Spells Known (CL 4th):
2nd (3/day)—*detect thoughts* (DC 19), *evil eye** (DC 19), *hold person* (DC 19), *magic circle against good*, *see invisibility*, *web* (DC 19), and *wither limb** (DC 19)
1st (3/day)—*cause fear* (DC 18), *charm person* (DC 18), *detect good*, *heartache** (DC 18), *protection from good*, *sleep* (DC 18), *unnerving gaze**(DC 18)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th):
At will—*greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *charm monster* (DC 21), *minor image* (DC 19), *unholy blight* (DC 21)

Abilities Str 22, Dex 23, Con 24, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 25
SQ boost spell-like ability, detect mortals, mortal skin
Feats Alertness, Dodge, Improved Critical (light crossbow), Mobility, Mortalbane, Rapid Reload, Track
Skills Bluff +19, Concentration +17, Diplomacy +13, Gather Information +9, Hide +18, Intimidate +15, Knowledge (local) +14, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +14, Listen +17, Move Silently +18, Search +14, Sense Motive +15, Spot +17, Survival +15
Possessions combat gear, *+2 leather armor*, *+1 distance light crossbow*, masterwork longsword, *cloak of resistance +2*, *elixirs of truth* (2)

Boost Spell-Like Ability (Ex) The Blessed Angel can boost the save DC of her spell-like abilities, increasing the save DC by +2. She may do so up to three times a day per spell-like ability.

Detect Mortals (Su) This ability duplicates the effect of *detect undead* cast by a 15th-level caster, except that mortals are detected. "Mortals" are any creature that aren't elementals, outsiders, undead, constructs, or fey.
Mortal Hunting (Ex) The Blessed Angel gains a +2 bonus on attack and damage rolls against mortals. She gains the same bonus on Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks when using these skills against mortals. The damage bonus only applies to ranged weapons against targets within 30 feet, and does not apply at all to creatures that are immune to critical hits.
Mortal Skin (Su) By magically grafting bits of mortal flesh to her body, the Blessed Angel can transform (as *polymorph*) into any humanoid mortal form, once per day. If the flesh used is from the exact individual being imitated, the duration is permanent. If the flesh is from a being of the same type, the duration is 1 hour. In either case, the Blessed Angel can dismiss the ability as a standard action.

*These spells are from the *Book of Vile Darkness*; if you don't have access to this book, replace *heartache* with *doom*, *unnerving gaze* with *bane*, *evil eye* with *blindness/deafness*, and *wither limb* with *death knell*.

32. Alhaster Barracks

The Watchers of Alhaster bunk in these one-story buildings, and use the large courtyard to train and as a staging ground for trials. The southernmost wing of the barracks includes nicer accommodations for barristers and judges (all of

whom are in Zeech's pocket). Alhaster punishes its criminals in one of four ways—exile, execution, fining, and imprisonment. The dungeons below these barracks are filled with hundreds of those who have been sentenced to imprisonment, many of whom have been forgotten to the outside world. Some of them have been imprisoned since Zeech withdrew Redhand from the Shield Lands 20 years ago; it's certainly possible that some of the previous rulers of this once-proud city languish still in these dungeons.

33. Zeech's Palace

The red stone wall that surrounds Zeech's Palace supports dozens of statues—all of which are of Zeech. The grounds feature many gardens set with beautiful orchids, monkey-puzzle trees and small waterfalls and ponds. Each garden has a fanciful title (such as the Vertiginous Terrace), and Zeech often incorporates them into his wild and decadent galas.

The Palace itself is a fanciful hodgepodge of various styles, but it has a central core that houses the Great Banqueting Hall as well as Zeech's private menagerie and quarters. In all, there are some two hundred and fifty rooms within the palace. Zeech constantly orders the construction of new wings and additions in an attempt to capture the coliseums of bronze and glass visible in his dreams, and many of these areas are obviously unfinished.

Zeech is attended at all times by his personal guards—four invisible Blessed Angels who wear *rings of invisibility* (who are themselves not part of the contingent in area **31**) who are usually within 30 feet of him. Approximately fifty palace guards (all 1st-level human warriors) led by a dozen 5th-level human fighter sergeants man the palace, all armed with crossbows and shortswords. If the palace is attacked or Zeech comes into peril, one of the erinyes immediately teleports to the Aerie to alert the other Blessed Angels, who in turn quickly teleport into the palace to aid the prince. Up until recently, the palace staff consisted of human commoners, but when a ship full of freaks seeking a new home after their old one was destroyed by a dragon arrived in town, Zeech was immediately taken by their bizarre forms and fired his staff, hiring the freaks as replacements. Zeech, in all his misguided ego, feels that by surrounding himself with deformity, he more perfectly approximates the true beauty of the human form.

Aside from Zeech (and whoever his current lover may be), the only regular inhabitant of the palace is his daughter, a reclusive half-fiend named Hemriss who has a minor to play in "The Prince of Redhand" and a more important role in "Dawn of a New Age."

34. The Great Project

Zeech's obsession is his "Great Project," a massive ziggurat of stone. He ordered the destruction of several houses (including several noble manors) south of his palace, forcing those who lived within to relocate elsewhere (all of the evicted nobles abandoned Alhaster in protest, and settled in other provinces in the Bandit Kingdoms).

Now, the area is a huge collection of hovels arrayed around the Great Proj-

ect, homes for the craftsmen and slaves Zeech uses to build the ridiculous structure. Deaths and terrible injuries are common as Zeech forces the workers to toil faster. He is constantly forced to replace the workers with desperate laborers or slaves purchased from other bandit kingdoms. Hobgoblin Watchers patrol the site, and one in five is accompanied by a worg. These bored guards have been known to "accidentally" let the worgs run amok in the tentyards. The workers rise at dawn, eat a frugal meal and then toil until darkness on the project, which now rises to two hundred feet (and is widely believed to be almost finished). A narrow road rises around the outside of the great building, constantly filled with oxen that drag hefty stones and huge timbers up the slope. Poorly constructed cranes lift other items up to the heights, yet the whole site is so poorly managed that the project is well behind schedule. Visitors are not allowed on site, but security is so lax that it is relatively easy to infiltrate the area and explore.

The structure itself is constructed of local red stone. Its walls are built on a series of arches that support the towering walls above—the top of the structure is clustered under bamboo scaffolding and timber. Anyone making a DC 20 Knowledge (architecture and engineering) check can see that the tower is very close to completion—a few months work will see it done.

Characters who have played "The Spire of Long Shadows" may note the similarity between Zeech's project and the ziggurat and spire they found in Kuluth-Mar—this is intentional. Zeech's inspiration for the project comes directly from Lashonna, who intends to use the site, once it's finished, to stage Kyuss' return and to begin the Age of Worms.

35. Alhaster Harbormaster

This building once served as a home and office for the Alhaster Harbormaster, but under Zeech's rule, there has been little in the way of regulation in the harbor. This building has fallen into disrepair, and serves as an adjunct for Eel River Transport. There are usually a few men lounging here, ready to ferry visitors across the Eel River for a 2 cp fare.

36. Eel River Transport

This large building is owned and operated by an "enterprising" hobgoblin named **Gothtur** (LE male hobgoblin expert 5) who claimed ownership of this building not long after Zeech took over. He did so by murdering the previous inhabitants and taking over their transport service. At first, Gothtur was taken with the novelty of playing at living as a human, but over the years he has found he actually has a taste for running a transport business. Passage up the Eel River into the inland provinces of the Bandit Kingdoms is fairly cheap, with prices ranging from 2 sp up to 1 gp, depending on the destination.

37. Alhaster Shipyard

The collection of buildings north of Alhaster once housed fishermen and shipbuilders, and this large building was where the majority of the shipbuilding took place. During Zeech's rule, these buildings have fallen into disrepair. Today, vagabonds, landlocked pirates, and other desperate souls dwell in these buildings.

38. Radalar's Regret

The Bandit Kingdoms have a special talent for breeding lunatics, and Redhand is no exception. One of the most bombastic and public lunatics of recent years was the eccentric noble Radalar. When he announced he was unhappy with Zeech's rule and intended to build a new city that would rival Alhaster, the other nobles laughed at him. When he announced his plan to found this city (which he dubbed Radalar City) only a few hundred feet to the east of Alhaster, they laughed all the more. Unfortunately for Radalar, he only got halfway done with the first building of Radalar City before he abruptly vanished one night. Rumors about his disappearance have settled on the obvious—that he was carried off at night and slain by the Blessed Angels at Zeech's command. Whatever the cause, his half-completed palace remains here on the banks of the Eel. Its proximity to Ilthane's lair (area **39**) made it a perfect place for the dragon to meet with visitors, which has given rise to new rumors that a dragon lives nearby.

39. Traitors' Graves

After Zeech's madness took hold, he crucified Alhaster's Knights of Holy Shielding on this low island in the Eel River, so that all who traveled the river could hear their cries of pain as they died. Some years later, a black dragon named Ilthane arrived in the area and carved out a lair under this island. Lashonna took note of the dragon's arrival, and she manipulated events so that the Ebon Triad contacted the dragon and forged an alliance with her. Ilthane is likely now dead, slain by the PCs at the start of "A Gathering of Winds," but her legacy lives on in the cavern below the Traitor's Graves.

DIRTY LITTLE DM TRICKS

BY MONTE COOK
BY KYLE HUNTER

We've covered a lot of the fundamentals in this column so far. This month, it's time to move on to a more advanced topic, although truthfully what we're going to discuss lies at the very essence of running a game.

Part of being DM doesn't have anything to do with charts, stats, battlemats, or careful preparation. It doesn't even have anything to do with creativity. It's all about manipulation. Yeah, you read that right. Although it's rarely discussed, almost all good DMs develop little tricks to make the game run more smoothly—and as the de facto "leader" of the group sitting around the table it behooves you to do what you need to do to make the others happy, even if they don't realize you're doing it. Sometimes—oftentimes, in fact—getting the players to do what you want is best for the game and allows everyone to have the most fun, but the trick is doing it without letting your players know that's what you're doing.

Why work so hard to get them to do what you want? Why not just give them total freedom? Remember, you know what's down every path. You know which choices are more fun, and which ideas are bad ones before players do. You know what things will lead them toward the overarching plot, the next cool adventure, or simply to the adventure you have planned out. (In other words, while railroading the players is bad, "railroading" them without them feeling railroaded is another thing entirely.)

Some of these tricks help control the mood of the game. Some help direct players to go in the direction you want.

Most involve manipulating people in subtle ways around the game table, and some involve downright lying. That's all part of being a DM, though, whether people realize it or not.

This is, by the way, a column that you should make sure your players don't see. (As my editor is one of my players, let me just say, Erik, I never use any of these in my own game. Trust me.)

The Value of Secrecy (and Lies)

Obviously, DMing involves secrecy. The players don't know what lies beyond the next door, but the DM does (ideally). The players don't know what will happen if Lord Feldamere gets his hands on the *many-jeweled flagon*, but the DM does. The DM knows all the secrets. Keeping those secrets from the players is a fundamental part of being a DM.

Some DMs use a DM's screen of some kind. Now, there's a lot to be said for *not* putting a barrier between you and your players. Things seem a bit more fluid and open. It's easier to pretend you're just sitting around the table telling stories, which can be a nice environment. But you give up a lot of opportunities if you don't use a screen.

For example, our first trick is an oldie but a goodie, and works best with a screen. It's the good old "pretend to roll dice" trick. Lots of DMs do this. Roll a die behind the screen and spend a moment—just a moment—scrutinizing the result as if it had meaning. Any player paying attention will wonder what you're rolling dice for. Are there monsters coming up from behind? Is someone spying on them? Is the floor not safe? This feeling of unease reminds players that they don't know everything that's going on—there's mystery and danger out there.

You can also have your notes or a rulebook behind the screen, which gives you a position of power. You can see something they can't. This is particularly handy when the players catch you off guard and do something you weren't expecting. You don't have to tell them you're flat-footed. Just pretend to refer to your notes. Flip to the next page, as if you knew all along they'd do whatever it is they're doing. You don't have to be an actor (although it helps), just remember less is more. Don't overdo it. Your players will see through that. Just a few quick glances and a relaxed expression on your face is all you need.

Don't let the players see you struggle. A sense that you're in control gives them confidence in the game and helps establish verisimilitude. They're likely to get lost in the fantasy if they don't ever have to worry whether you're prepared or not.

Keeping Everyone Happy

Watch your players carefully. Be open to their feelings and emotions. If one player is obviously not having fun, figure out why. For example, a player might not feel like they're making significant contributions to the game. Turn things around—sometimes right on the spot—so that something only they can do is crucial. If the player is playing a cleric character, throw some undead at the party in the very next encounter. If he's a rogue, make the next door locked. A little success can go a long way.

But sometimes the problem is bigger than that. One character might feel significantly underpowered compared to another character. In such a case, put a magic item only that PC can use in the next batch of loot that turns things around. Even if the item is slightly overpowered (emphasis on *slightly*), that's okay, because it might be that the character in question is, in fact, underpowered because of improper feat choices or something.

Sometimes, however, *you're* the problem. A player might feel like you're picking on him or his character unfairly, even when you aren't. In this case, you can use metagaming to your advantage. You see, players often use metagame thinking to assign your personal motives to events that happen in the game—they might think you're "cheating" to keep a favorite villain alive or imposing "unfair" restrictions on them because they're doing something you don't like or didn't expect. But you can circumvent these feelings by doing some metagame manipulation.

For example, let's say a PC wizard casts a number of protective spells on himself, including *mirror image*. Then, he immediately goes into an area with a creature with tremorsense. When that monster starts tearing him apart, he might think that you're just being mean. So try this: as the PC goes into the room, you look at the monster's stat block, pondering for a moment. Then, turn to *another* player, preferably one that knows the rules pretty well, and say quietly, "a creature with tremorsense probably sees right through illusions, doesn't it?" The answer is, of course it does. The player you ask is likely to say yes, and even the player playing the wizard will have to admit that it will. Now, it's not *you* that's being mean, it's the rules. Them's the breaks.

Play to Each Players' Goals

I've written this before, but it's worth repeating here. Know your players. Know what motivates them and what motivates their characters (and remember that the former is more powerful than the latter). Use this knowledge to get the players to do what you want. If the PCs are headed out of the dungeon before getting to a really cool encounter that you have prepared, but one of the PCs is a paladin who is a sucker for people in distress, have them hear a person—maybe even a child—scream for help.

Once you have each individual player's weaknesses down pat, you should then learn who the thought leaders of the group are, and how their specific group dynamic works. There's often one player who has a dominant personality, or a couple of players who have stronger voices regarding what to do next, while others are more willing to just go along for the ride, happy to do whatever. Sometimes, the group dynamic is even more complicated than that, though.

For example, I have one player before whom I have dangled many plot hooks tailored to her and her character—and still she almost never takes the bait. However, if someone else in the group wants to do something, I know that I have to provide some kind of incentive for her

character or the group won't go off on that adventure. In other words, she's not an instigator, but she does have a lot of influence on those who are. (Even if she doesn't realize it.)

Choose Your Words (and Actions) Carefully

There are other smaller, less obvious ways to manipulate players as well. Remember that the players rely entirely on you for information about the game world. They're constantly looking to you for clues, whether they realize it or not.

If a player states his character is going to take an action you don't want him to (for whatever reason), pause just for a second after he speaks, locking your gaze upon his, as if you're waiting for him to say something else, or think better of what he just said. This might get him to do just that. Sometimes, you can restate what the player just said, as a confirming question. You don't have to give it any inflection or expression. Just restating calls the action into question. "You go down the stairs?" This is a far more obvious statement, and the players will notice if you overuse it. Sparingly, however, it can be fairly effective in getting the player in question to think that what he's doing is the wrong thing, and he'll retract it.

Advanced manipulators can take this a step further. After you subtly convince the player to rethink his action, pretend—just for a second—that you really don't want to let him do it. You can even say something like, "Well, okay, I guess. You don't go down the stairs even though you already said you did, but only because I'm a nice DM." Now the player thinks you did him a favor!

Another trick is feigned impatience. If the players are discussing what to do next and you, after a moment or two, say "well, what are you guys going to *do*?" most likely they will simply take the most straightforward course of action, or the course that the majority of people want to do. Assuming that's what you want them to do, it's a trick that usually works.

You can also feign disappointment. If the players announce some action that changes their course, such as leaving the haunted castle, you can sigh and close your notebook. The better you are at developing a "too-bad-you-missed-the-cool-thing" look, the better you'll be at manipulating the players. However, be warned—overdoing this one just makes you seem petulant.

Lastly, if you're desperate, you can even suggest actions without it seeming like you're doing so. Here's an easy one: "So, the bugbears are all dead. Did you want to search the room?" Or another: "Do you listen at the door first, like before?" Or even: "You said something earlier about going back to town. Are you going to do that now?" Just try to be as subtle about it as possible. Remember that just the right word or phrase at the right time can give the players the right idea without letting them know that *you* gave them the idea.

That kind of subtle use of language is a powerful thing. "You see an old wooden bridge spanning the chasm," sounds a bit worrisome to an experienced player. "The rickety old wooden bridge draped across the chasm has some missing planks," sounds downright ominous and will alter the way the PCs approach the encounter. "The ogre is wounded," is one thing, but "you've slashed the ogre with your weapons repeatedly but he still stands tall and strong, able to take a lot more punishment," is another. The former is just bland description, but the latter sounds like "run away" to a player paying attention.

Be on Every Player's Side

If one player is getting bored with being in town while everyone else is buying supplies or gear, look at that player and say "is everyone ready to go?" This will make him feel like you're empathetic. Then look at someone still pricing equipment and say, "have you found everything you need?" This seems like you're sympathetic to his needs. This makes everyone at the table feel good.

If you can make each player believe that you and he are particularly in synch, they'll be more likely to pick up on your cues—which is to say, they'll do what you subtly direct them to do, thinking that you're telling them the *right* thing to do, which in fact you are.

Difficult Players

Of course, some players are more difficult to manipulate than others. What this really means, however, is that some tricks work on some players, while other players require entirely different tricks. Once again, it all comes down to knowing your players, and knowing what works on them. The key is to use your position behind the screen to observe the game as well as run it, which means that you spend as much time listening as watching.

Next Time: Special Sessions Part 1: The Introductory Session.

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So is Player Choice All a Big Lie?

Some amount of honest choice is a good thing, and giving players the *feeling* that they have unlimited choice is an even better thing. You're not robbing players of their power when you direct them to go where you know they need to go. Ultimately, players want the game to go as well as you do. Sometimes they need a little help. Look at it this way: you're really manipulating the game, not the players. You're not trying to control every aspect of the game, only the important facets—and you're only exercising your control when it's needed, and never otherwise.

You use your power for good, not evil.

SPECIALISTS

BY MATTHEW GOODALL,
BY KYLE HUNTER,

Sometimes the PCs lack a set of skills or abilities that could dramatically aid their chances in an upcoming series of encounters, and they know it. Rather than try to brute force their way past the obstacle with the wrong tools, smart PCs look for outside help: a specialist. Specialists are most common at low levels when the PCs have limited resources, but even at high levels, a dedicated specialist can come in handy (to pick the diabolically complex lock of an adamantine vault in an *antimagic field*, for example). Finding such an extraordinarily devoted individual and convincing him to perform the task could be an adventure in itself. Here are a few sample specialists for you to use the next time your PCs need some extra help.

THE TRACKER

Yelt Smithson is a wiry man with short blond hair and a closely trimmed beard. He is normally quiet and taciturn, especially in crowds, but becomes animated when talking about the trail he is following. With an eye for detail, Yelt can often pick out information about his quarry from the smallest of clues. He rarely eats meat, and doesn't hunt animals except dangerous or unnatural predators.

Yelt's standard daily rate is 5 sp, but this fluctuates based on the threat of his quarry and the size of the area he must search. He has been known to lower or even waive his fee for a suitably noble cause. Yelt is also happy to teach his skills to those willing to learn them as long as his students show a proper respect for nature. The ranger fights only if pressed, preferring to pick off enemies from a distance with his bow.

YELT SMITHSON **CR 2**
Male human ranger 1/druid 1
NG Medium humanoid
Init +1; **Senses** Spot +6, Listen +6
Languages Common, Druidic, Elven, Sylvan

AC 14, touch 11, flat-footed 13
hp 14 (2 HD)
Fort +5, **Ref** +3, **Will** +5

Spd 30 ft.
Melee mwk battleaxe +2 (1d8/19–20)
Ranged mwk longbow +3 (1d8/x3)
Base Atk +1; **Grp** +1
Atk Option favored enemy +2 (monstrous humanoids)

Combat Gear *potion of barkskin* (+2), *potion of cure light wounds* (2), *potion of neutralize poison*
Druid Spells Prepared (CL 1st)
1st–*detect animals or plants, longstrider*
0–*cure minor wounds, guidance, resistance*

Abilities Str 10, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 8
SQ nature sense, wild empathy +3
Feats Self-Sufficient, Skill Focus (Survival), Track
Skills Handle Animal +4, Heal +7, Hide +5, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +7, Knowledge (nature) +11, Listen +6, Move Silently +5, Search +7, Spot +6, Survival +17 (+19 when following tracks)
Possessions combat gear, masterwork battleaxe, masterwork composite longbow with 20 arrows, leather armor, masterwork light wooden shield, dagger, backpack, healer's kit, hooded lantern, bedroll, flint and steel, waterskin, trail rations (7 days), 9 gp

Garoun, riding dog animal companion: hp 13, Survival +1 (+5 tracking by scent), *Monster Manual* 272. Garoun has the Assist Track trick (*Complete Adventurer* 100), which allows him to aid another on Survival checks made to follow tracks.

THE TRAPFINDER

A pale elf with long black hair, Anide has luminous eyes that sparkle with an emerald glow (her *eyes of minute seeing* are tinted green). Extremely cautious, she inspects every single spot in a hazardous area before proceeding. She is quite happy spending hours meticulously examining every inch of an interesting location. Her response to impatient PCs who ask her why it is taking so long is: "This is why elves have such long lifespans." One of the few things that can disrupt her calm demeanor is if her companions ignore her directions about where to step.

Anide demands an upfront fee of 10 gp, plus an equal share of any treasure they aquire through the use of her skills (guarded by a trap, or inside a locked chest or secret compartment). If the PCs deliberately ignore her advice or are otherwise reckless or foolhardy, she packs up, returns her down payment, and leaves, stating that she is unable to work with such careless individuals. Anide is perfectly happy to avoid all combat and prefers to wait until the PCs have cleared out the monsters from an area before entering it. If forced into battle, she stays in the middle of the group as best she can.

ANIDE'NEUMA **CR 3**
Female elf rogue 3
LG Medium humanoid
Init +3; **Senses** low-light vision; Spot +9, Listen +9
Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Gnome

AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14
hp 16 (3 HD)
Immune sleep
Fort +2, **Ref** +6, **Will** +2 (+4 vs. enchantments); evasion

Spd 30 ft.
Melee mwk longsword +3 (1d8/19–20)
Ranged mwk longbow +6 (1d8/x3)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +2
Atk Option sneak attack +2d6
Combat Gear *potion of fox's cunning*, flask of acid (3)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 13
SQ evasion, trapfinding, trap sense +1
Feats Skill Focus (Disable Device), Skill Focus (Search)
Skills Appraise +4, Balance +8, Climb +6, Disable Device +14, Escape Artist +9, Hide +9, Jump +6, Listen +9, Move Silently +9, Open Locks +11, Search +19, Spot +9
Possessions combat gear, masterwork longsword, masterwork longbow with 20 arrows, masterwork studded leather armor, masterwork buckler, *eyes of minute seeing* (as *goggles of minute seeing*), masterwork thieves' tools, 50-ft. silk rope, grappling hook, climber's kit, everburning torch, crowbar, 10-ft. pole, 27 gp

THE DIPLOMAT

An immaculately groomed individual, Garolwyn wears fine but not ostentatious attire. A seeker and broker of knowledge, his business is information, which he discovers either through his network of informants and contacts or, if necessary, obtains personally using Disguise and Sleight of Hand. A skilled negotiator, he can smooth over messy arguments or help others gain access to restricted places or uncooperative people. He is in touch with and often at the heart of most of the gossip and rumors that sweep the city. He never resorts to blackmail, knowing that this just makes unecessary enemies.

Garolwyn is happy to help the PCs for a fee, as well as for tales of their adventures or any other information they have that he might need. Payment in obscure knowledge is acceptable and often valued above mere coin. If confronted with a situation he can't talk himself out of, he tries to cause a distraction and flee. Anyone who tries to harm Garolwyn finds there is a long line of friends and contacts ready to seek revenge.

GAROLWYN **CR 4**
Male half-elf bard 4
N Medium humanoid (elf)
Init +1; **Senses** low-light vision; Spot +2, Listen +2
Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Giant, Undercommon

AC 11, touch 11, flat-footed 10
hp 16 (4 HD)
Immune sleep
Fort +1, **Ref** +5, **Will** +5 (+7 vs. enchantments)

Spd 30 ft.
Melee mwk dagger +4 (1d4/19–20)
Ranged mwk dagger +5 (1d4/19-20)
Base Atk +3; **Grp** +3
Combat Gear *poition of expeditions retreat*, smokestick (2)
Special Atks bardic music 4/day (inspire competence, inspire courage +1, *fascinate*, countersong)
Spells Known (CL 4)
2nd (1/day)–*heroism*, *suggestion* (DC 15)
1st (3/day)–*comprehend languages*, *disguise self*, *hypnotism* (DC 14)
0 (3/day)–*detect magic*, *light*, *mage hand*, *message*, *read magic*, *resistance*

Abilities Str 11, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 13, Cha 16
SQ bardic knowledge +9
Feats Negotiator, Skill Focus (Diplomacy)
Skills Bluff +11, Diplomacy +26, Disguise +15 (+17 acting), Gather Information +15, Knowledge (history) +8, Knowledge (local) +8, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +8, Perform (storytelling) +13, Sense Motive +10, Sleight of Hand +10
Possessions combat gear, *circlet of persuasion*, concealed masterwork dagger, courtier's outfit, disguise kit, signet ring, 148 gp

CHUTES AND LADDERS

BY TIM HITCHCOCK,
BY KYLE HUNTER,

One of the easiest ways to make an environment more alien and exciting is to alter the way its occupants traverse it. While stairs are the most familiar way of ascending and descending the levels of a dungeon or similar structure, consider using some of the following alternatives.

LADDERS

A ladder is any traversable object that connects two or more planes that can be used to ascend or descend between them. Using a ladder usually requires a Climb skill check.

Alchemically Treated Giant Spider Webs: These webs are strong and rigid, and provide ample places for feet and hands to grip (Climb DC 10). Individuals who fall while climbing an alchemically treated web can make a DC 20 Reflex save to catch themselves before they hit the ground.

Maximum Weight Load 600 pounds; Hardness 2; hp 4; Break DC 18.

Carved Runes: This ladder is nothing more than a set of large runes deeply engraved from floor to ceiling (Climb DC 10). Oftentimes their function as a ladder isn't obvious, so they may lead up to a secret room or compartment.

Hanging Chains and Rings: This ladder consists of a series of hanging chains bolted to the ceiling via 6-inch-diameter iron rings. The chains are set 5 feet apart with each successive chain 1 foot longer than the next. Characters can travel on them by swinging up from one rung and grabbing onto the next with a DC 10 Climb check. Setting chains farther apart increases the DC by +1 per foot of space. Distances of more than twice the character's reach are impassible and require the character to swing and then jump to the next ring. In this case, the character must make a Jump check (DC 15 +1 per each foot beyond double his normal reach) before making a Climb check to grab the next ring.

Per Chain and Rung: Maximum Weight Load 1,000 pounds; Hardness 10; hp 10; Break DC 27.

Hanging Torture Cages: This "ladder" consists of several iron maidens chained together and suspended from a higher level. They are not too difficult to Climb (DC 10), but could hold grisly occupants, living, dead, or undead.

Maximum Weight Load 3,000 pounds; Hardness 10; hp 40; Break DC 28.

Ladder Woven from Braids of Human Hair: This gruesome ladder is somewhat flimsy and cannot hold much weight. It is not rigid, making it somewhat difficult to Climb (DC 15) if it isn't near a wall or similar solid object. The strands tangle easily and blow about in a high wind, adding +10 to the Climb DC unless a second person can hold the ladder still while the other person climbs. An opponent can attempt to knock a climber off by shaking the ladder, forcing him to make a Climb check (DC 10 plus the opponent's Strength bonus). Hair ladders are highly susceptible to fire and take triple damage from fire attacks.

Maximum Weight Load 300 pounds; Hardness 0; hp 1; Break DC 20.

Pillar of Cemented Skulls: This ladder is a solid pillar composed of humanoid skulls that have been cemented together. It is not too difficult to Climb (DC 10), however the skulls are enchanted to animate and bite at climbers once they are about halfway up. The skulls are easy to destroy, although doing so also destroys the ladder.

Biting Skulls Trap: CR 1; magic device; touch trigger; automatic reset; Atk +8 melee 1d4 skulls for 1d4+1 each; Search DC 20, Disable Device DC 24.

Maximum Weight Load 1,000 pounds; Hardness 1; hp 3; Break DC 15.

Pole Steps: These are 8-inch-diameter wooden poles of varying heights hammered into the ground in an ascending spiral. The spiral is usually 5 feet in diameter, with each pole is set 3 feet apart at a height 1 foot higher than the previous step. To ascend or descend, individuals must make alternating Jump (DC 6) and Balance (DC 10) checks for each pole. You can determine the Jump and Balance checks for alternate pole widths, heights, and distances using the *Player's Handbook* (pages 67 and 77).

Maximum Weight Load 600 pounds; Hardness 5; hp 15; Break DC 18.

Tree Trunk: This ladder is made from a pine tree trunk stripped clean with the branches shorn into short climbable stubs between 3 and 6 inches in length. It is stable, easy to climb (DC 5), and can be moved (45–65 pounds) so as to make a reusable, portable ladder.

Maximum Weight Load 600 pounds; Hardness 5; hp 100; Break DC 30.

CHUTES

Chutes connect two planes and they are specifically built to provide passage in a single direction (usually down). Chutes can provide fast passage, but require characters going at full speed to make a Tumble check at the bottom to avoid damage. A slower, controlled descent at the character's normal speed can be made with a Balance check. A typical chute of metal, wood, or stone has a chute speed of 90 feet per round, a safe recovery Tumble check DC of 10, a controlled descent Balance check DC of 10, and a Climb check DC of 15. Adding water or oil to a chute's surface increases its speed by +20 feet per round and the DC of any related skill checks by +5.

Chutes sometimes empty into something that can help break a fall, such as straw, cloth, nets, or offal (reduce falling damage by 1d6). Other times they end with a fall into anything from a pool of water to a snake-filled room or a pit filled with sharpened spikes.

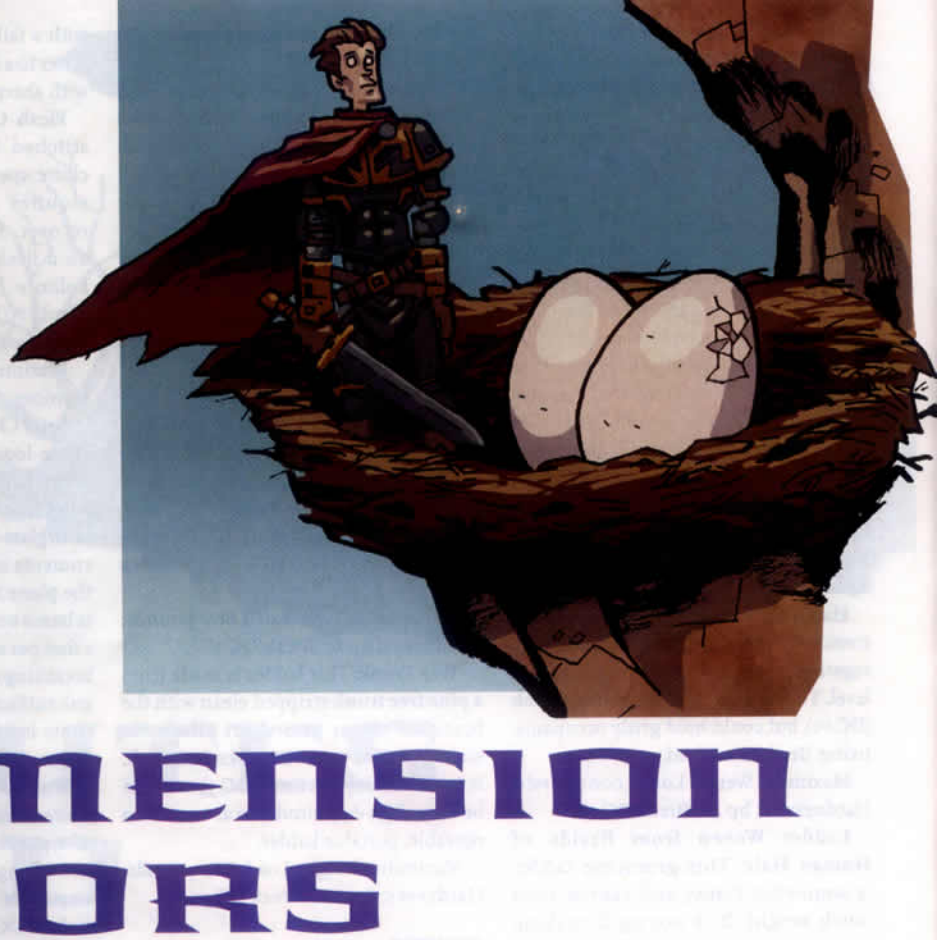
Flesh Chute: This is a giant canvas stitched from humanoid flesh. Full chute speed is 120 feet per round and requires a DC 12 Tumble check to recover. Making a controlled decent on a flesh chute only requires a DC 5 Balance check, and the chute can be climbed (DC 15). Flesh chutes are relatively weak and easily damaged.

Maximum Weight Load 500 pounds; Hardness 1; hp 2; Break DC 20.

Sand Chute: The upper portion of this chute looks like a massive pit of sand. When sufficient mass is added, the sand runs through the chute, forming an hourglass-like sinkhole that deposits its contents into another large sand pile on the plane beneath it. The speed of travel is based on the traveler's weight: it moves 1 foot per round for every 10 pounds. Air-breathing creatures traveling in the sand risk suffocation. Climbing back up a sand chute is near-impossible and requires a DC 40 Climb check.

Worm's Gullet: This long spiraling chute is made from the lacquered gullet of a purple worm. It is slick and those not taking proper precautions slide at a speed of 160 feet per round and must make a DC 16 Tumble check to recover. This type of chute is difficult to descend safely (Balance DC 18) and even harder to Climb (DC 20). Anyone failing either of these checks descends the chute at full speed and must make a successful Tumble check or take falling damage.

Maximum Weight Load 1,000 pounds; Hardness 6; hp 13; Break DC 23.



DIMENSION DOORS

BY NICHOLAS LOGUE,
BY KYLE HUNTER,

The universe is more fragile than we think. Any number of effects disrupt havoc on the fabric of reality and open a doorway to another dimension. A random *gate* mishap or any effect that sends a PC to another plane can also wreak havoc on a gaming session (*prismatic spray* is another common culprit). Where do the PCs go when they are sent to a randomly determined plane? When a planar mishap occurs, consult the following options, each a springboard for interplanar adventure. When the PCs step into that *gate* they might arrive in any of the following locations.

1. In the middle of an elven couple's romantic picnic outing in a lush field on Arborea.
2. Dumped on stage in the middle of an acrobatics performance by a troupe of magmin in the sultan's own Sulfur Theatre in the City of Brass on the Elemental Plane of Fire.
3. Atop a colossal floating metal cube hurtling through space on Acheron seconds from collision with another cube.

4. Among a caravan of shackled petitioners traveling through an acidic snowstorm on Gehenna.
5. Dropped in a river of thick mud and sucking silt on the Elemental Plane of Earth.
6. Inside a council chamber in the City of Glass during a secret alliance meeting between kuo-toas, sahuagin, and lizardfolk on the Elemental Plane of Water.
7. In the dark joyless cell of an insane pit fiend held captive on Carceri, who madly plans his conquest of the Nine Hells. The fiend claims he knew the PCs would arrive and attempts to use them in his crazed plan.
8. Inside a twisting jagged tunnel connecting the Elemental Plane of Air and Pandemonium.
9. Surrounded by gorgeous and hungry erinyes in the quarters of a powerful devil's harem in the Third Circle of Hell.
10. Atop a rapidly melting iceberg now floating in the River Styx in the 113th layer of the Abyss, surrounded by the river's noxious water.
11. On the deck of a flying ship owned by a mad cartographer obsessed with charting the Ever-Changing Chaos of Limbo.
12. On Kord's throne in the Hall of the Valiant on Ysgard.
13. Floating in a current on the Positive Energy Plane near an archmage that is enjoying the plane's enhancing effect on his magic by unleashing devastatingly powerful spells in all directions just for the fun of it.
14. On Mechanus where a group of demons is engaged in an act of sabotage, damaging a lynchpin that connects several gears.
15. Next in line at an arm wrestling contest between orcs and goblins on Acheron.
16. In a special forge on the Elemental Plane of Fire where a legendary azer smith channels the unearthly heat of the plane to forge his peerless blades.
17. Right next to an enormous vein of pure gold on the rocky slopes of Bytopia.
18. In the simple hovel of a fiendish goblin cobbler in the First Circle of Hell.
19. On the Plane of Mirrors looking out a mirror portal onto a distant scene of a friend, family member, or lover engaged in some uncharacteristic act of betrayal or evil.
20. At a wild bacchae party on the Olympian Glades of Arborea.
21. In an open field beneath a brilliant canopy of stars on Arcadia moments before night instantly becomes day with the sun shining brightly overhead.
22. At the gate of the Crawling City on Gehenna as it scuttles forward, crushing anyone caught in its path.
23. Atop an enormous tiered wedding cake at a nuptial ceremony for two angels on Celestia.
24. In the great hall of a mighty orc warlord on Acheron seconds after an assassination attempt on the warlord's life.
25. In a celestial roc's nest in the Beastlands.
26. In the finest vineyard of the Blessed Fields of Elysium during a wine tasting celebration among angels and other celestial guests.
27. Within an enormous clockwork tower on Mechanus from which inevitables monitor temporal disturbances throughout the universe.
28. In a vast, splendid orchard of peaches on Arcadia where a group of unfortunate celestials are sentenced to an eternity of picking peaches to atone for various transgressions.
29. Within an encampment of yugoloths being trained by their ultraloth commander on the Bleak Eternity of Gehenna.
30. Deep in a kelp forest ruled by tritons seeking allies in a war against a powerful sea hag on the Elemental Plane of Water.
31. Floating in the middle of an animating field on the Positive Energy Plane.
32. Near a train of celestial prisoners being transported to an undead-infested dungeon in the doldrums of the Negative Energy Plane.
33. Dragged in the wake of a fiendish kraken on the 88th layer of the Abyss.
34. In the Realm of Dreams, trapped in their archenemy's nightmares.
35. In a dense forest in the Beastlands where wild elves hunt a celestial dire boar for sport.
36. Amidst an airborne joust between djinn on the Elemental Plane of Air.
37. In the line of fire at an archery contest on the Heroic Domains of Ysgard.
38. On top of a frost giant ice carver's dinner table in Winter's Hall on Pandemonium.
39. In the gizzard of a fiendish purple worm in the Abyss.
40. In the middle of the training session of several githzerai monks in the courtyard of their floating monastery in Limbo.
41. On the Plane of Shadow in a version of the PC's own hometown, eerily deserted on this plane.
42. In a ruined floating castle haunted by the ghost of a mighty storm giant king on the Elemental Plane of Air.
43. In the middle of a giant chaotic battle between two warring goblin tribes and maug mercenaries on Acheron.
44. Deep in a lightless maze of razor sharp rocks, populated by half-earth elemental minotaurs on the Elemental Plane of Earth.
45. In a hovering coliseum where sphinxes engage in riddle duels for sport on the Elemental Plane of Air.
46. Near a crag on the Gray Waste of Hades where a cabal of night hags compare larvae and share tales of the terror they visited upon hapless sleeping victims this night.
47. In a cherry blossom tree forest on Arborea where a famed elven poet struggles over the final couplet of his latest work.
48. In front of the market stall of a fire mephit who peddles all manner of cookware on the Elemental Plane of Fire.
49. Amongst a crowd gathered to watch a parade of great heroes (complete with a marching band) on Ysgard.
50. Inside the armory of a floating githyanki fortress on the Astral Plane.

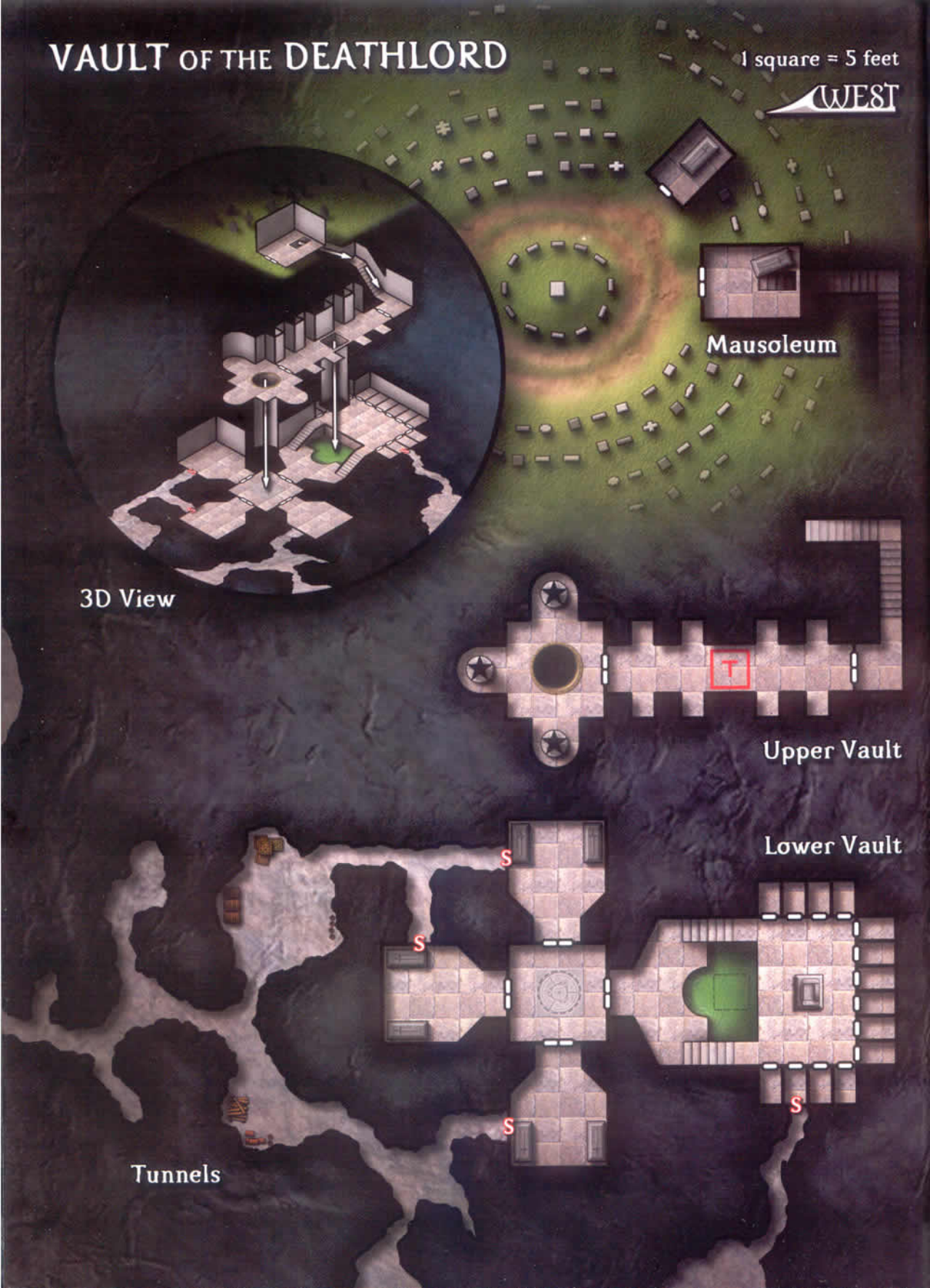
Downer IX

Fool's Errand

WE WERE BONDING IN THE GALLEY OF THE BACHELOR GODDESS, WHEN WE RAN INTO TREACHEROUS WATERS. MR. RAGGLE, THE GOBLIN, EXPLAINED THAT THIS PORTION OF THE RIVER FLOODED RELENTLESSLY, DRAINING BOTH BATTLEFIELDS AND GRAVEYARDS. THIS STRETCH HAD TAKEN ON A HAUNTED TAINT. THE ELF AND IZANK DISCOVERED THIS FOR THEMSELVES WHEN A SPOT OF CRIMSON DEATH, AN UNDEAD VAMPIRIC MIST, ATTACKED.

Story and art by **Kyle Stanley Hunter.** Lettering by **Sean Glenn.** Downer is ©2005 Kyle Stanley Hunter. A **Super Unicorn** production. **www.superunicorn.com**

ROBBLE
ROBBLE
Fig. 2 - GHOST PIRAHANA
RAGGLE! HE WAS A GOOD MAN, YA BEASTIE!
WHERE YOU BEEN?
THIS IS IT. GOOD-BYE.
TO BE CONTINUED


VAULT OF THE DEATHLORD
1 square = 5 feet
WEST
Mausoleum
3D View
T
Upper Vault
Lower Vault
S
S
S
S
Tunnels

DUNGEON #131

MAP & HANDOUT SUPPLEMENT

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DUNGEON
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MONTE COOK'S DUNGEONCRAFT • DOWNED • MT. ZOGON

Udon Studios with Chris Stevens & Pierre Theriault

THE BEASTS OF AULBESMIL

by Skip Williams

The sleepy forest town of Aulbesmil has seen better days. Orcs and monsters lurk in the woods now, but the real menace hides in the town itself. A D&D adventure for 3rd-level characters.

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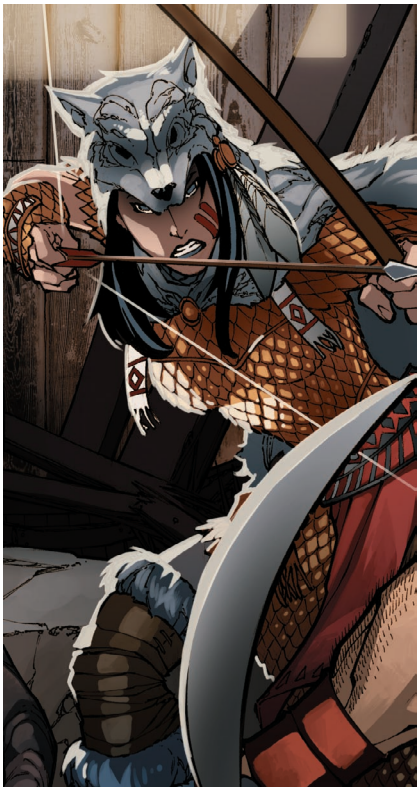
Archer



Udon Studios with Chris Stevens & Pierre Theriault

Ghini

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Robert Lazzaretti

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Cyril Van Der Haegen

THE HATEFUL LEGACY

by Greg A. Vaughan

At the end of the Hateful Wars, Lord Sandor led his army into the Barrier Peaks in pursuit of a host of goblins and orcs. He and his army vanished, and now a group of adventurers follows his footsteps to discover what doom fell upon him and his men. A D&D adventure for 12th-level characters.

Zorgus

Cyril Van Der Haegen

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Kazgorva

Cyril Van Der Haegen

Cyril Van Der Haegen

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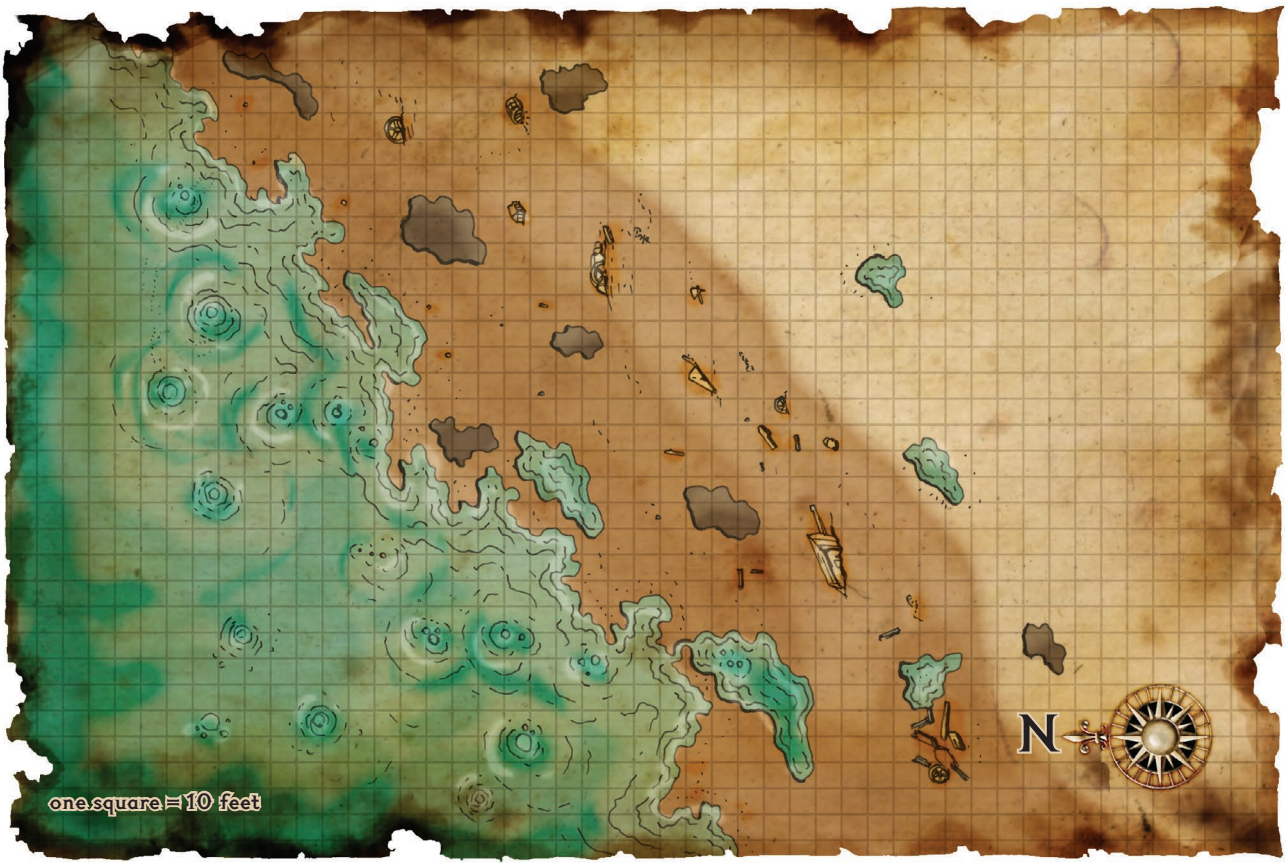

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Joachim Barrum

THE PRINCE OF REDHAND

by Richard Pett

Prince Zeech, the ruler of the town of Alhaster and lord of the domain of Redhand, is throwing a party. Bandits, slavers, pirates, and worse have been invited, along with a mysterious woman who holds the key to the coming apocalypse. An Age of Worms Adventure Path scenario for 15th-level characters.

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Alhaster is the key.

Missing heretics never captured... Possible site of Ebon Triad foundation? Did they turn to the cult of Erythnul for aid, and then more recently to that of Vecna? Are new triad leaders trained somewhere in Alhaster, and then sent out to start their own cult cells in other cities?

To Do:

- Lashonna (helped defeat heretics, may know more about them that wasn't printed)
- Rhorsk (research indicates he did not flee Alhaster after it fell—he's probably dead but may have left some sort of legacy)
- Ebon Triad (are they still active in town? Find out if their original hideout/shrine still exists)

Twenty Years of Joy

You are hereby and cordially invited to attend
and behold the wonder and beauty of our magnificent
ruler on this, the twentieth anniversary
of his liberation of our fair city!

Your carriage awaits two hours before sundown
on the eve of this magnificent event.

Scheduled Course of Events

Gathering in the Vertiginous Terrace

The Harlequinade Mortificatio
Premiere

Handsome Slaughter of Curious Avians

Lively Sports and Baiting
Win the Golden Egg

Bowling the Devious Heads
Win the Silver Skull

Five Course Feast

Song! Dance! Braggery!
As Time Permits

B'kruss

Eva Widermann

Mahuudril

Eva Widermann

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Acidwraith

Eva Widermann

Steve Prescott

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Hemriss

Eva Widermann

Kilraven

Eva Widermann

Montague Marat

Eva Widermann

Mariss Quemp

Eva Widermann

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Eva Widermann

Lashonna

Shag Solomon

Eva Widermann

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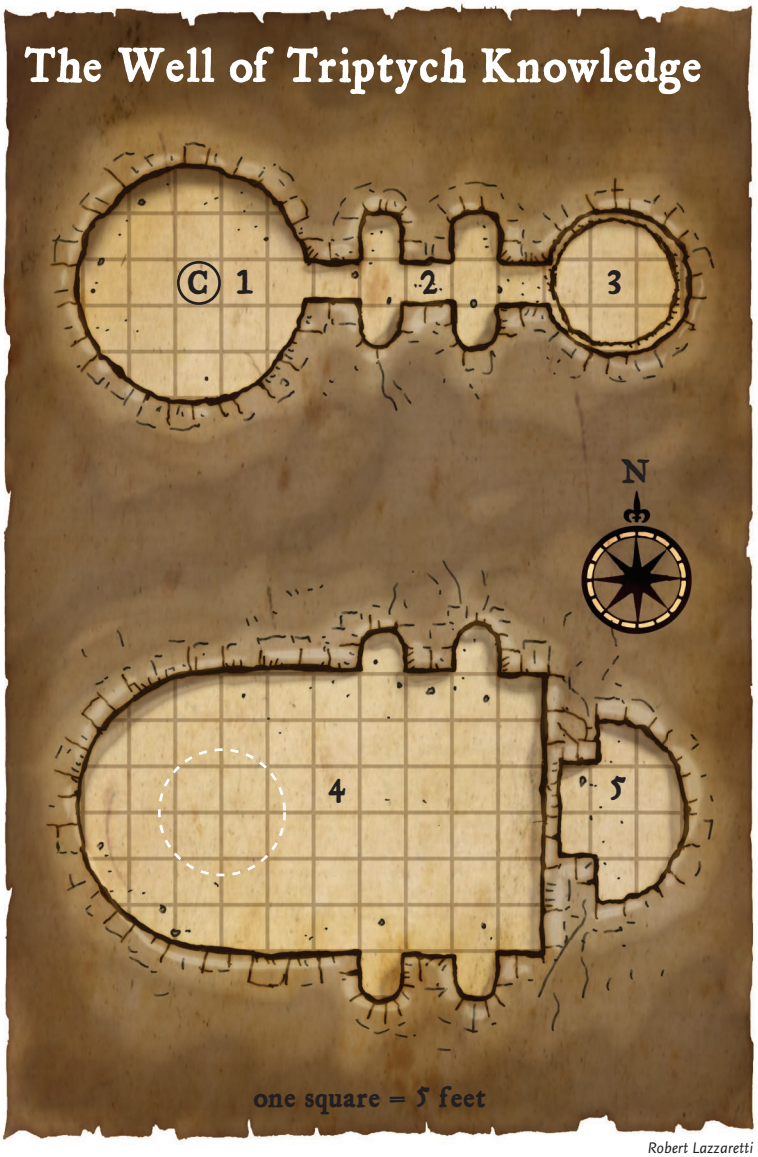

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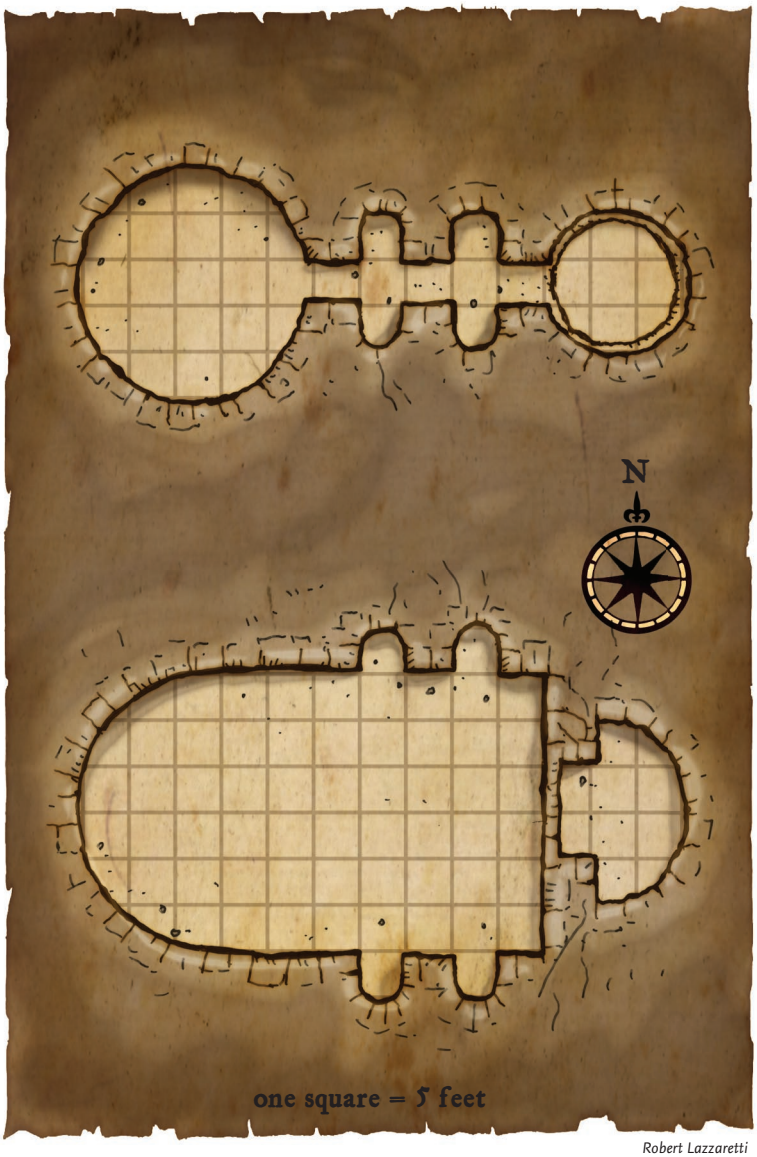

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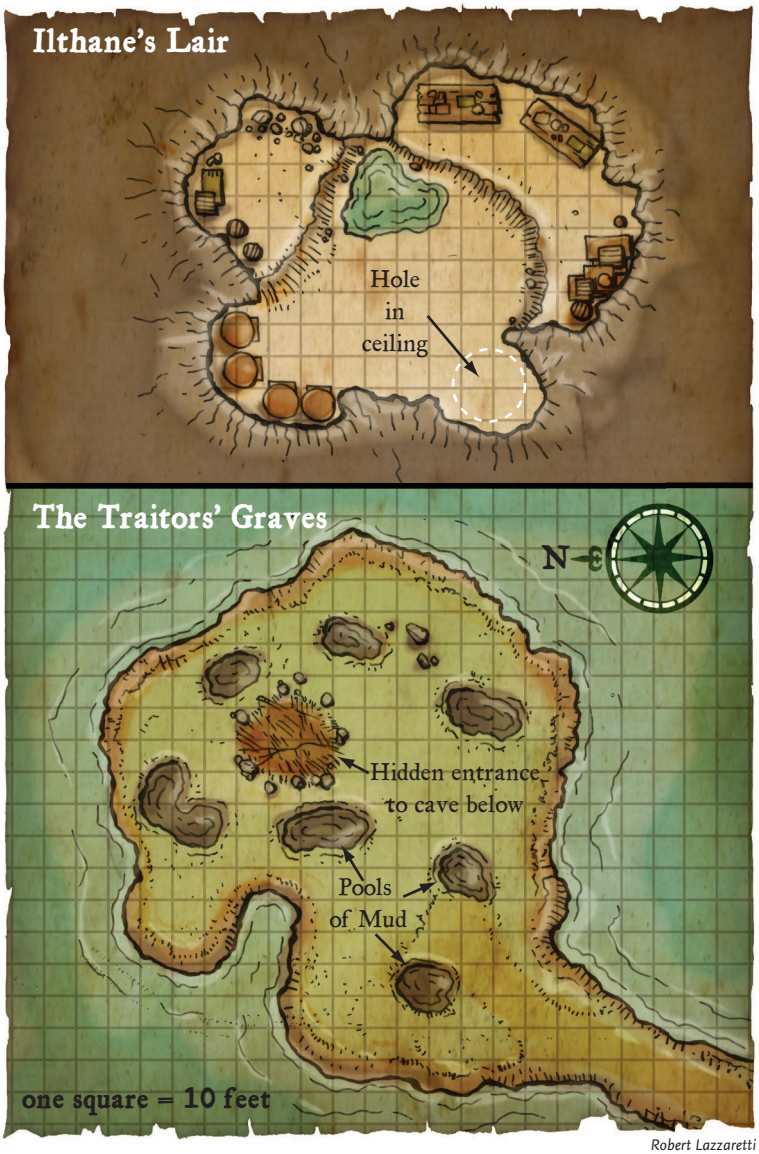

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Eric Deschamps

BACKDROP: ALHASTER

by Richard Pett

Tour the dark streets of the only port in the Bandit Kingdoms—the troubled town of Alhaster. As the Age of Worms nears its epic conclusion, his city will become an important part of the unfolding events.

Prince Zeech

Eric Deschamps

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Blessed Angel

DULAC *Chad Dulac and Udon Studios with Herbert Kwan and Kevin Yan*

Chad Dulac and Udon Studios with Herbert Kwan and Kevin Yan

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RUNNING THE PRINCE OF REDHAND AND BACKDROP: ALHASTER IN EBERRON

By Keith Baker

The Principality of Redhand

The northeast coast of Khorvaire is ruled by the Lhazaar Princes. By their very nature, the Lhazaar Principalities are a collection of city-states, and a region where the right to rule must be earned, not simply inherited. This makes the region an ideal location for Redhand and Alhaster, which can in fact simply be added to the existing map of the Lhazaar Principalities. On the map of the Principalities (*Eberron Campaign Setting*, page 186), there is a region of plains approximately 100 miles south from the port of Skairn. The land between the two massive forests is Redhand: the port city of Alhaster should be placed on the east coast, setting it between Skairn and Tantamar.

The dominant religion of Redhand is a sect unique to the principalities, known simply as the Deep Brethren. This cult combines the worship of the Devourer and the Mockery: a pirate's religion promising blood on the water. Its adherents believe that their dark faith gives them claim to anything that lies on the seas, but they throw a share of plunder into the deep to ward off foul weather. In the Five Nations, it is rare to see the deities of the Dark Six worshipped openly, but the Lhazaar Principalities are a cold, dark realm whose people face the wrath of the Devourer every day. Alhaster is the greatest temple of the Deep Brethren, but cultists can be found in many of the other principalities. Members of the Deep Brethren do not consider themselves to be evil (though most are); their faith is a shield and an adaptation to the harsh realities of life on the Lhazaar Sea. In Alhaster, the worship of the Deep Brethren is also seen as a curious form of freedom, a joyous refusal to accept the limited views of the Sovereign Host, embracing the powers that others fear.

Prince Zeech is particularly devoted to the Mockery. While the most infamous followers of the Mockery are known for the practice of self-mutilation, the Mockery is a god of deception; Zeech's youthful beauty is a gift from his patron, a handsome mask to hide his inner darkness. Likewise, he has managed to deceive himself as to his true goals. But the Mockery is still a god of war—and Zeech is a deadly warrior when pressed too far.

As noted in previous sidebars, the deities of the Ebon Triad should be changed to the Mockery (Hextor), the Shadow (Vecna), and the Keeper (Erythnul). Dol Dorn replaces Kord, Dol Arrah can be used instead of Heironeous, and the Silver Flame takes the place of St. Cuthbert. The worship of Wee Jas is replaced by the Watchful Rest, a sect that reveres both Aureon and the Keeper.

The character levels for some of the NPCs in Alhaster are somewhat high in comparison to many of the known NPCs of Eberron; at 15th level, Miszen Mitchwillow is more powerful than any sorcerer mentioned in *Sharn: City of Towers*. It is up to the DM to decide whether to lower the level of some of these NPCs, or whether Redhand is a nexus for powerful individuals who have come together at this time of chaos to tip the scales one way or the other.

The Blessed Angels

It is a rare thing to see fiends openly in the cities of Eberron, but it is such a rare occurrence that few people know how to tell an angel from an erinyes. As noted in the Alhaster backdrop, the Blessed Angels truly serve Lashonna, and through her the Lords of Dust. This squad of erinyes came to Eberron after a bitter feud in the outer planes, and swore allegiance to the Council of Ashtakala; at Lashona's request, the servants of Kyuss-Katashka dispatched the Angels to Alhaster.

Dragonmarked Houses in Alhaster

It is up to the DM to decide whether or not to give the dragonmarked houses an interest in Alhaster. It could be that Zeech and Mahuudril have used influence, violence, and magic to keep the houses out of Redhand. If the houses are in the city, they can serve as allies or enemies for the PCs once they take power in Alhaster. The houses have their own interests, and will see a change of leadership as an opportunity!

In adding the houses to Alhaster, consider the following.

House Jorasco and Sivis are likely already in Alhaster, but won't press for more influence. Communication and medicine are common needs; if the city doesn't have a Sivis message station, the new leaders will want to get one established if they want to communicate with the outer world.

As the local source for mercenaries, Hoff's Solutions may be an arm of House Deneith. In this case, Hoff Deneith would be a human instead of a dwarf. He can still have a taste for banditry; this is a dark region, and the people of House Deneith are only human.

Miomay's Playhouse would become an outpost of House Thuranni, and Miomay herself would be an elven heir of that house. House Thuranni is always interested in increasing its power in the principalities, and with its gift for gathering information it would be a very valuable ally for new rulers… but a sly ally with great ambitions! While the Playhouse would be the center for their activity, the Thuranni would also be deeply involved with the black market.

Chosk Underpate of The Curious Owlbear may be an heir of House Ghallanda, and even if the many inns and taverns aren't Ghallanda outposts, they may very well be licensed by the Hostlers' Guild.

The Crafters' Guildhall would be an outpost of House Cannith; Iomandi (of Iomandi's Wonders) could also be an heir of Cannith.

House Lyrandar would have an outpost at the harbor.

The Grand Banquet

Many of the notable NPCs of Alhaster attend Zeech's banquet; here are a few ways to tie these individuals to Eberron. The DM can also choose to add other NPCs from the Lhazaar Principalities to the party—one interesting option is Prince Mika Rockface (*Eberron Campaign Setting*, page 185). Mika has no agenda at the party; she is simply an old friend and ally of Prince Zeech, and the banquet provides an opportunity for the adventurers to encounter this infamous pirate in a non-combat situation.

B'kruss and V'juss

As a skilled hobgoblin fighter, B'kruss could easily be an emissary of one of the Dhakaani clans, such as the Kech Sharaat; along with the Knights of Redhand, he is learning the lay of the land and establishing connections

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in preparation for the time his clan claims leadership of the Heirs of Dhakaan, Darguun, and the lands beyond. A DM who chooses this path should simply highlight the skill and discipline of B'kruss and his warriors. As one of the foremost warriors of the Kech Sharaat, B'kruss is no brute: he is a cunning soldier from a proud civilization.

Following Dhakaani tradition, the mystic V'juss would likely be female. A DM who wants to go to more trouble could change her class from sorcerer to bard; this would make her one of the duur'kala, the dirge singers who serve as spiritual leaders among the Dhakaani goblinoids.

Hemriss

Many fiends trapped on Eberron find a home with the Lords of Dust, and this was likely the case with Hemriss' erinyes mother. As some among the Lords of Dust are tied to the rise of Kyuss (as detailed in earlier conversion notes), it is possible that Hemriss and her warrior-gypsies have a tie to events even Zeech doesn't know of; perhaps Hemriss is still reporting to her mother as well as working with her father!

Lashonna

Lashonna was once an agent of the Chamber; she worked with a sect of eastern druids whose traditions mirrored those of the Gatekeepers. Like Dragotha, she was captured and corrupted by the power of Kyuss-Katashka. Aside from this point of history, her nature and goals remain the same.

Miszen Mitchwillow

There are a number of ways to keep Miszen's role as a spy. If her race is changed to gnome, she could be one of the top agents of the Trust of Zilargo, using her magical powers to monitor the entire east coast of Khorvaire. For a more sinister story, she could remain as a halfling, but be a servant of the Dreaming Dark, her original personality replaced long ago by a quori mind seed. In this case, she should be a psion (telepath) instead of a sorcerer.

Toris

Toris is a noble from the gnome-dominated island of Lorghalen.

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RUNNING THE PRINCE OF REDHAND AND BACKDROP: ALHASTER IN THE FORGOTTEN REALMS

by Eric L. Boyd

Conversion notes for Bane (Hextor), Bhaal (Erythnul), Myrkul (Vecna), Tempus (Kord), Torm (Heironeous), Agath Harpell (Agath of Thrunch), Dagsumn (Eligos), Malchor Harpell (Manzorian), Prendergast "Gast" Brokengulf (Loris Raknian), Daggerford (Diamond Lake), Longsaddle (Magepoint), Skull Gorge (Rift Canyon and Wormcrawl Fissure), the Tower of Twilight (Fortress of Unknown Depths), and Waterdeep (the Free City) have already been mentioned in conversion sidebars for earlier adventures in the adventure path.

Mintarn

Mintarn (Redhand) is a medium-sized island in the Sea of Swords (Lake of Unknown Depths) several hundred miles southwest of Waterdeep. (Note that this puts it some six hundred miles south-southwest of Longsaddle, still within the range of *teleport*.) Mintarn is best known as a safe haven for those in flight from authorities. This beautiful tree-cloaked island is a free port on the Sword Coast where no questions are asked and no one (other than pirate hunters) is turned away.

Mintarn is part of a small archipelago, which includes nine islands of any size. (Only six are depicted on the map included in the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* [3rd edition], but maps from earlier editions show the entire chain.) The archipelago is nominally under the rule of the Tyrant of Mintarn, but in truth the other islands are largely ungoverned. The second largest island, which lies to the north and west of Mintarn, is known as Skadaurak, and is home to Hoondarrh (CE male ancient red dragon), the legendary "Red Rage of Mintarn." (See *Dragon* #241 or http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/wn/20021023a.)

The island of Mintarn has two settlements. The capital, Mintarn (Alhaster), lies on the southern coast, and a smaller harbor and town, known as Queen's Cove, lies on the eastern coast. Both settlements are a refuge for fugitives from justice, pirates, war refugees, mercenaries, and others who want to transact business (shady or otherwise), buy arms, or enjoy themselves away from the watchful eyes of foreign rulers and more proper authorities. The capital's wine taverns, such as the Freemantle (Angry Rifter Tavern) run by Dunkin Tallmast (Telgrith Vanerath), and festhalls are legendary up and down the Sword Coast for both their services and their danger. Queen's Cove is dominated by the Cove of the Queen, a temple of the Bitch Queen, and ruled by the Wavemistress Royal (high priestess of Umberlee). The island's only road (The Toilway) connects the capitol city with Queen's Cove. The Eel River emerges from a spring in the center of the island and runs south to empty into Mintarn Harbor.

Fighters, barbarians, bards, and rogues are welcome in Mintarn. Clerics of Bane, Kelemvor (Wee Jas), Tempus, Umberlee, and Valkur don't raise eyebrows if they display their faith openly, and these deities have functioning temples in town. Clerics of Helm, Ilmater, Torm, and Tyr are particularly vilified in Mintarn. Druids and rangers are associated with the "simple" Ffolk of the southern Moonshaes, whether they hail from there or not. Monks are rare in Mintarn, and those who are here are universally regarded to be agents of the church of Ilmater, so they are accorded the same scorn as clerics and paladins of Helm or the Triad. Arcane spellcasters are fairly uncommon, yet they are neither particularly loved nor particularly hated.

See Chapter 7 of the novel *Passage to Dawn*, by R. A. Salvatore, for a further glimpse of the port of Mintarn.

Tarnheel Embuirhan

Tarnheel Embuirhan (LE male Tethyrian human fallen paladin 8/ blackguard 8 [Bane], Prince Zeech) is the self-styled "Tyrant of Mintarn." Despite his title, in the early days of his rule his "Tyrancy" ("Most Beautiful Majesty") was known to be open-minded, open-eyed, and open-handed, and traditionally let Mintarn tend to itself in most of its day-to-day dealings. In recent years, however, Tarnheel has grown increasingly tyrannical, in keeping with his growing ties to the church of the newly arisen Bane. As Tyrant of Mintarn, Tarnheel keeps order (brutally, if the occasion calls for it), keeps individuals from using force to gain their ends on his island, and acts to prevent pirates, other realms, or other scalawags from gaining control of Mintarn. His closest advisors include Szentarr Ravin (NE male Tethyrian human illusionist 10, Armhin Loratio), and Bharandas Zhan (LE male Vaasan human wizard 12), a renegade mageling of the Zhentarim.

Grand Banquet

Most of the invitees from to the Grand Banquet are pirate captains or minor lords from the Sword Coast or other islands in the Sea of Swords (Bandit Kingdoms)

B'Kruss

B'Kruss is a notorious mercenary whose company, the Knights of the Nelanther (Knights of Redhand), regularly serve aboard pirate ships and merchant ships dealing in illicit cargo.

Rhorsk

Rhorks was a cleric of Helm (St. Cuthbert). (Note that this is a different conversion done for St. Cuthbert than was done in Daggerford [Diamond Lake] for the temple of Lathander [St. Cuthbert]).

Miszen Mitchwillow

Miszen is a spy from Athkatla (Dorakaa), in the kingdom of Amn (Empire of Iuz), who serves the infamous thieves' guild known as the Shadow Thieves. Her goals in Mintarn are to keep an eye on politics and visitors and to advise her guild accordingly, as they move to take control of trade along the Sword Coast

Toris

Toris (NG male Ffolk human aristocrat 11) hails from the Moonshae Isles (specifically the southern half of the island of Alaron), and he is the only noble from the Moonshaes who accepted Tarnheel's invitation.

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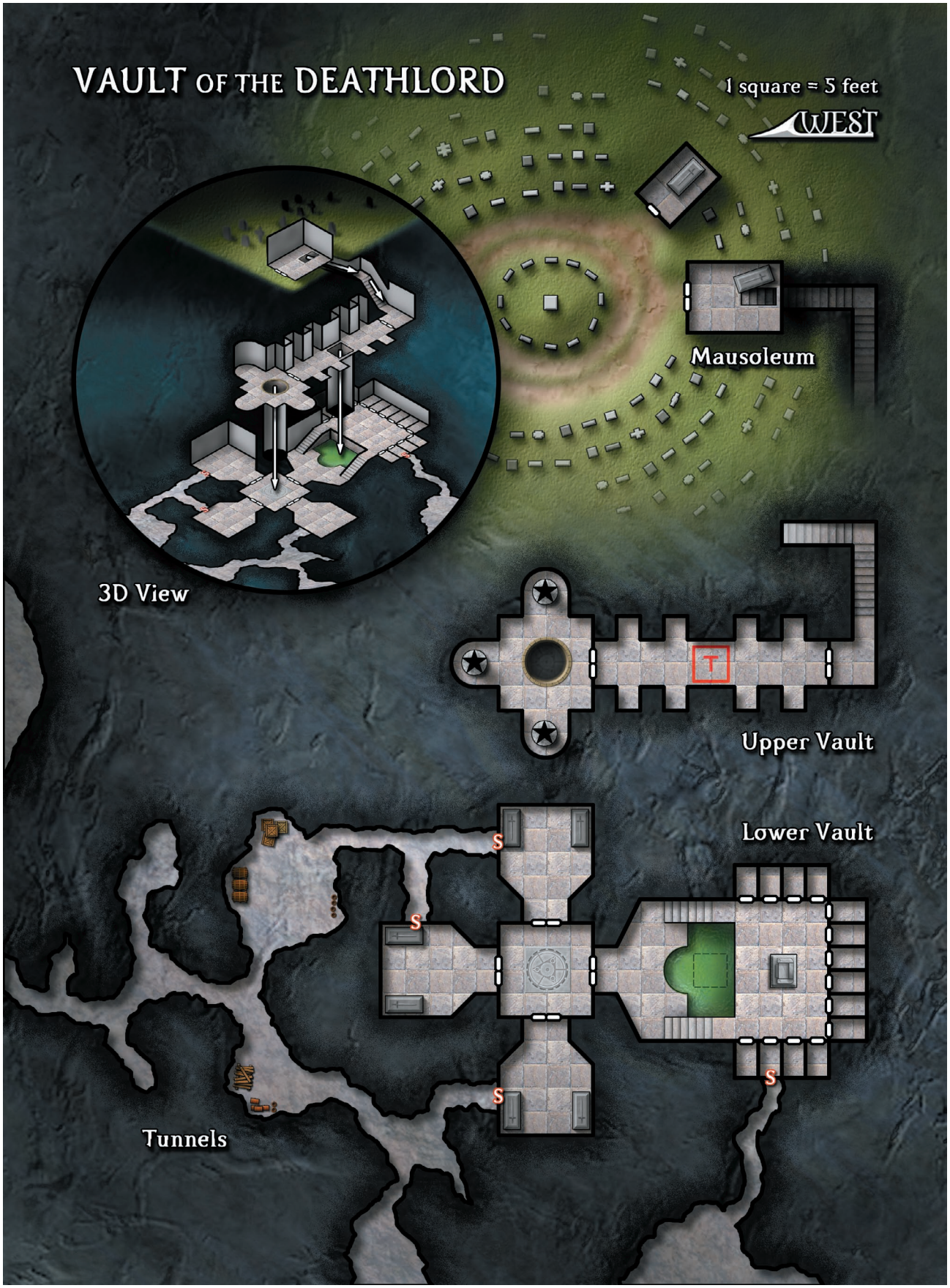

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